

A PONY EVERY TIME

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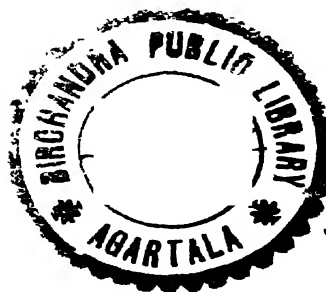


"Crumbs!" exclaimed Susan.

GEOFFREY LAPAGE

A
PONY EVERY TIME

Illustrated by
ANNE BULLEN



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ASH COURT, SELBURY

Chapter One

“DADDY! It’s simply wonderful!” Susan Cameron said as she and her father picked their way carefully down the narrow, winding stair that led from the attics of Ash Court, their new home in Selbury. They had arrived there only an hour before in their car from Wallace’s farm in East Anglia, and Susan had insisted on going over the house at once.

“The whole house is wonderful,” she continued. Much nicer than our Camford house, especially the attics, all creaky and creepy, with those old, uneven oaken floors! And the dormer windows too! Why, anything might have happened up there—yes, anything at all.”

Mr. Cameron closed the door that shut off the attic stairs. “I dare say it could,” he said with a smile. “This part of the house is very old. It goes back, I should say, to Elizabethan times. I’ll try to find out what its history is. By the time you get back from school I shall know a good deal about it.”

He led the way down the stairs into the hall.

“When is it that you go back to school?” he asked. “Monday morning, didn’t Mother say?”

“Yes,” nodded Susan. “Only three days from now—only two, as a matter of fact, because on Monday I have to catch that train to Camford at half-past eight.”

She followed her father down the long passage that led to the kitchen.

"Not much time to explore," she said, "and get Dusky settled in. School will be funny this term, now I'm going to be a boarder when I've been a day-girl all this time."

Through the kitchen door she saw that her mother had put out cold ham and salad, cheese and bread and butter, and a bowlful of tinned apricots.

"Oo, Mother!" she exclaimed. "What a lovely meal! I didn't know you'd brought so much food along with you."

Mrs. Cameron smiled.

"The ham is a present from Mrs. Wallace," she said. "She knew we'd be hungry after the drive from East Anglia. We'll go on having our meals in the kitchen here, until we get the dining-room cleaned up."

She made the tea and sat down to pour it out.

"Such a lot to do when you move to a new house," she said. "One thing I liked about it, when we came to see it before, is that it's not in Selbury itself. We're quite in the country here."

"Just about a mile from the town," Mr. Cameron said. "This road that passes the house goes to Blakeston and Bidley Green—on the way to the Potteries. Dusky will like this country, anyway. Plenty of good rides and as good a paddock as any pony could wish for. What shall we do with him all the time you're away at school?"

Susan helped herself to jam.

"Oh, don't talk about school," she said. "It's ages till the Christmas holidays. Before I go back to Camford I must arrange with someone to keep an eye on Dusky

while I'm away. There's sure to be somebody here who can have a look at him now and then. The vet., perhaps, or somebody he could recommend. . . ?"

Her father agreed.

They chatted about their plans and spent the rest of that September evening getting settled in for their first night in the new house. Susan's bedroom, the only one on the right at the top of the stairs, was low-ceilinged and square, like the dining-room beneath it, and its window looked out north across the short drive. On the left of the top of the stairs was a smaller room over the hall, and opposite this, a bathroom and another staircase down to the kitchen and scullery. Beyond the smaller bedroom, past the attic door, was the room in which Mr. and Mrs. Cameron were to sleep. This room, which was over the sitting-room, looked out south to what they had decided to call "the lower lawn."

As she lay in bed that night, Susan made up a letter to Peter telling him all about the house; and the next evening, after tea in the sitting-room, she decided she really would write to him.

"If only," she said as she got out her writing-pad and fountain-pen, "Peter and Ann could come and stay with us here and bring their ponies, too."

Mrs. Cameron, who was sewing Susan's name on the new navy blue beret that she was taking to school, smiled to herself and glanced at Mr. Cameron, who was making notes for a lecture.

"I was rather expecting that," she said. "As a matter of fact, Father and I were thinking of inviting them—for the Christmas holidays."

"Oh, goodee!" exclaimed Susan. "Then can I ask

Peter in this letter now? And write to Ann? And can they bring their ponies, too?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't ask them," Mrs. Cameron agreed. "But I don't know about the ponies. Would there be room for them, Jack, in the stables, three of them?"

"Plenty, I should think," muttered Mr. Cameron, not looking up from his notes. "And, anyhow, there's the paddock as well. Ask 'em, by all means."

"Oh, thanks!" replied Susan. "We'll house the ponies somehow, Mother, don't you fret."

She sat down to write as fast as she could to catch the evening post.

"The garden's as big as yours," she wrote to Peter, after describing the house to him. "Bigger than yours, I should think; and the paddock's just as big. Dusky's as happy as anything, grazing there. There's a coppice, too, on one side of the paddock, full of rabbits, and badgers, too, they say, though I haven't seen a badger yet; they only come out at night, so Father says, and, of course, you can't see them in the dark. And we're right in the country here. It's all wonderful: and I've just asked Father and Mother whether you and Ann could come for the Christmas holidays; and they say you *can*, so do come, Peter, and bring Blaze. I'm writing to Ann tonight, too, to ask her to come. She could trek over, Father says, from Chipping Campden to a place called Bridgnorth, so that she wouldn't have to ride through Birmingham; but how you and Blaze would come, I really don't know. It's much too far to ride, I expect; but you can think of a way."

Peter's answer came to her at school. It came on a

black day, when she'd had a wiggling from Miss Blenkinsop, her maths mistress, for what Miss Blenkinsop called her "pig-headed inability to try to understand decimals". The letter made the day blacker still. Peter couldn't come because his father was taking him and his mother to Torquay to spend Christmas in an hotel there.

"It's really because of Mother," Peter wrote. "She's not been well; and Father's not had a holiday at all this year, you know."

Ann's answer, which came the following week, was disappointing too. Ann couldn't come because she was going to be busy all through the hunting season getting the Riding School pupils fit to ride to hounds.

"Not that I know a lot about it myself," she modestly wrote, "but the boss here does, and I'm learning a lot from him, and I just try to pass it on to the others as well as I can. You'll be getting some hunting yourself, I suppose, up there. The boss says the South Cheshire is a fine and very well-managed pack, so when the holidays come, see if you can't get a day or two out with them. But watch your step. A fast line across unknown country—that means a hard, cracking gallop, you know, taking the fences as they come—that's different from what we did round Birley and Manordown. Dusky's sure on his feet, of course, but I shouldn't call him a hunter, and your luck may not always hold."

Susan folded up the letter with a frown. No, Dusky wasn't a hunter; she knew that well enough; but she'd hoped that, even so, they might—she and Peter and Ann—have gone out with the hounds. Now neither Peter nor Ann could come. It was going to be pretty lonely during the Christmas holidays.

Chapter Two

JACQUELINE AND EVAN BACH

As it turned out, Susan had more than enough to keep her busy when the Christmas holidays came. To begin with, there was the house, and especially the attics on the third floor.

"Three of them," she wrote to Peter, "and all as creepy as you could wish. I was up there last night, getting something for Mother out of a box she's parked up there, and gosh! the creaks and groans. I nearly skedaddled once in a funk, but Mother was waiting, so I had to set my teeth and carry on. I'm sure that something's happened in the past up there. There may be a secret room or a passage—or a priest's hole, or something like that. Father says there couldn't be. He says that the attics belong to the older part of the house, and that any secret room would have to be in the newer wing, where the kitchen and bathroom are, but it couldn't be there, because it's too new for secret rooms. But he does say that he's got an idea that the house—the older part of it, I mean—is somehow connected with an old Abbey ruin called Wanderby not far from here—down by the river. I haven't been there yet. There's only a farm at Wanderby now, I think.

"Well, no more now. I must hop off to the paddock and get Dusky in. It's getting chilly at nights now, so

I'm letting him have the stable—a bit of a mollicoddle, but it gives me something to do."

She posted the letter in the pillar-box down the road where it forked into the road to the Potteries and the smaller Stapley road beside which Ash Court stood. Then she got her stable lamp from the kitchen and went to bed Dusky down.

"Don't you wish," she said to him as she gave him his feed in the stable, "that Peter and Blaze were here? And Ann and Pepper, too. Well, never mind," she sighed as she gave the stable a last look round to see that everything was all right. "Perhaps they'll come for Easter. And, anyhow, you and I can have lots of rides by ourselves."

She closed the stable door and was starting down the garden towards the house when she heard her mother's voice. "Susan! Susan!" she was calling from the lower lawn. Susan shouted "Coming!" and ran down the garden, swinging her stable lamp in the frosty air.

"Good gracious! It's cold!" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron, clutching the scarf she had thrown around her neck. "I thought I should never make you hear. Mrs. Clement and her daughter Jacqueline have just dropped in for tea and I wanted you to meet them."

Susan was pleased. Mrs. Clement was the wife of the only doctor in Selbury. Mrs. Cameron had met her some time before at the Rector's house when they had first come up to see Ash Court, and had learnt then that Jacqueline, who was a year older than Susan, had a Welsh pony and sometimes was allowed to ride to hounds. She also had a brother called Jimmy, a year older than herself.

"Oh, Jacqueline—yes," said Susan as they went into the house. "I want to get to know her. She might take me hunting if you and Father will let me go."

She ran upstairs to wash and change her jeans for a skirt and blouse. "Hunting!" she thought as she combed her hair. "But would her father let her ride to hounds?"

"If Jacqueline can, I don't see why I shouldn't too," she decided as she took the stairs two at a time and crossed the hall to the sitting-room.

Jacqueline looked up eagerly as Susan came in. She was sitting with her grey-haired, anxious-looking mother and Mrs. Cameron beside the blaze of the coal and log fire. She was a slim girl, about Susan's height with dark-brown hair that was parted in the middle and drawn back on either side. Her large eyes were grey and her tanned face, which spoke of an open-air life, had a strange smile, "almost a Mona Lisa smile," as Susan's mother put it afterwards. But Susan didn't care what sort of a smile it was. She liked Jacqueline instinctively; and Jacqueline seemed to like her as well. It wasn't long before they were seated side by side and talking ponies as if they had known each other for years. Mrs. Cameron and Mrs. Clement let them talk.

"It's so nice that they both have ponies," Mrs. Clement said. "Jacqueline keeps hers in a field we rent a little way up the Crowe road. We've only a garden at Hawthorn Cottage, you know."

Hawthorn Cottage was one of the few old houses that had survived the fire that had destroyed the greater part of Selbury in 1583. A distinguished house, with attractive gables and diamond panes in the windows,

it had caught Mr. Cameron's eye the very first time he had driven through Selbury.

"I do love the tiles round your fireplace," Mrs. Clement went on. "I've never seen nursery rhymes so charmingly done. Tom, Tom, the Piper's son and Little Boy Blue there blowing his horn. . . ."

"And Little Jack Horner putting his thumb in the pie in the corner," Jacqueline agreed. "And look, Mother, Mary, Mary, quite contrary. And who's this? Little Tommy Tucker, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Cameron; "The tiles were here when we came; but Susan, I think, is a bit too old for them now."

"I'm not!" Susan protested; but she knew in her heart that she'd hardly given them a thought.

"Well, perhaps," said Mrs. Clement, "you'll love them all again when you have children of your own. Jacqueline, you've arranged for Susan to come and see you, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Jacqueline. "She's meeting me tomorrow and we're going to have a look at Evan Bach."

"That's Jacqueline's pony," Mrs. Clement explained to Mrs. Cameron as she got up to go. "He was called Evan when my husband bought him in Radnorshire last year."

"And we added the 'Bach'," explained Jacqueline. "It's Welsh for 'dear', you know."

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When Jacqueline and Susan arrived next morning at

the field on the Crowe road, Evan Bach was grazing quietly beside the bullfinch hedge that enclosed the field.

"Oh, he's nice!" exclaimed Susan. "And doesn't he look strong! What a lovely head he has. More like an Arab than a Mountain pony, I should say."

"Yes; people always say that," agreed Jacqueline. "He's not the pure Mountain breed. If he were, he'd be smaller, I suppose. They say you can tell a Welsh from a Welsh Mountain by the smaller head and small, prick ears and widely-set eyes; but I don't know, of course. I'm only going by the books."

"That's just what I do," Susan said. "Dusky's a New Forest cross, but I don't care really what he is. I like to ride him; that's all."

Jacqueline nodded as Evan Bach came across the field to her.

"Of course, that's all that matters," she said. "It's just the same with dogs. I've no patience with people who own a dog just because he's got a pedigree a mile long."

She held out a hand as Evan Bach came up to them.

"Father chose him because he's a chestnut," she said. "There was a black, he said, at the Radnor Fair, and sometimes I wish he'd chosen that. But black's not usual among the Welsh, I'm told, though I'd like to see one of the rarer ones that are cream with blue eyes."

"Oh, blue eyes!" laughed Susan. "I never heard of a pony with blue eyes."

"Oh, you do get them," said Jacqueline. "No, Evan Bach, I haven't got any apples today. This is Susan;

she's got a pony, too. One day you'll have to let her ride you, you know."

"Oh, may I?" Susan exclaimed. "I should love to see how he goes. But I'm not a very good rider, you know." She tickled the pony's poll and Jacqueline gave her an unbelieving look.

"Sez you!" she replied. "I've heard all about you winning that Red Rosette at Manordown."

She rather liked Susan because she blushed.

"Oh, that was a fluke," said Susan. "Or, rather, it was Dusky who won the Rosette. Now I know Evan Bach," she said, "you must come and see Dusky and see what you think of him. I put him out in the paddock just before I came round to call for you. I know what we'll do," she suggested. "Why not bring Evan Bach down to our paddock now and let him and Dusky make friends? They'll jolly well have to if we're going to ride together as we've planned. Have you got any tack up here?"

"No; that's the trouble," Jacqueline said. "I have to keep it down at home and either lug it up here, or what I often do is to ride Evan Bach bareback down to the house. But he'd go without a halter, I'm sure. Look. Let's risk it. I'll ride him bareback and you can walk and—you know—shoo any motors or dogs away if they come too near. Not that Evan minds either," she added as she scrambled on to his back. "And, anyway, it's only a quarter of a mile and there won't be much traffic about."

They reached Ash Court without incident and went up the drive that ran along the garden to the stables and the paddock beyond.

"Oo! Stables!" said Jacqueline. "Aren't you lucky! Stables and a paddock. Of course! That's Earl's Covert over there. I didn't know you were so near to that."

Susan was puzzled.

"Earl's Covert?" she asked as she opened the gate of the paddock to let Jacqueline and Evan Bach into it.

"Yes; that covert there on the right," said Jacqueline. "Everybody in the Hunt knows that. They sometimes come cubbing there."

"Cubbing!" Susan exclaimed. "Do they really come to our copse for that? But isn't it much too little for that?"

"Nothing's too little," Jacqueline said, "so long as it holds a fox. So that's Dusky," she added, slipping off Evan Bach.

They left Evan Bach to graze and walked across to where Dusky was lazily chewing a mouthful of grass by the copse. He turned his head to look at them and frisked his tail.

"He's wondering," said Susan, "who you and Evan Bach are; and he's glad, I shouldn't wonder, to have a bit of company." Then she exclaimed at a sudden thought. "Why shouldn't he have Evan Bach for company all the time?"

She stopped, with an eager look at Jacqueline.

"Why not?" she repeated. "If we're going to ride together, why shouldn't Evan Bach stay here? There's plenty of feed for them both: and the stables, too, if we want them. There's plenty of room in there."

Jacqueline didn't know what to say.

"But wouldn't your father object . . ." she began.



It would, she was privately reflecting, be much nicer to keep her tack in Susan's stables and not to have to trek up to the Crowe road field every time she wanted to go for a ride.

"Father wouldn't mind a bit, I'm sure," she heard Susan saying. "He never uses the paddock himself—nor the stables either, except as a garage for the car; and, anyway, he's in Manchester most of the week, except when the University's having its holidays. No; I'll ask Mother at dinner-time," she concluded. "And anyway Evan Bach can stay here today, unless you want to take him back to your field."

"Indeed, I don't," laughed Jacqueline. "This paddock is nearer and the feed's better, I should say. Hello, Dusky, you're nice," she added as Dusky came over to Susan and playfully nipped at the sleeve of her dress.

"No, you don't!" said Susan. "And I haven't got any apples either today. This is Jacqueline. Make friends with her: and later on with Evan Bach, who's going to live here with you. Understand?"

She smiled as Dusky let Jacqueline tickle his poll and run a hand gently down his neck.

"He knows you're fond of ponies," she said. "Look how he's smelling your clothes."

"I rather think he does like me," Jacqueline said. "I hope you'll let me ride him now and then, just as you can ride Evan Bach, if you like."

"Of course," agreed Susan. "Try him now if you like."

"What, bareback?" Jacqueline said. "Well—all right—if you're sure you don't mind."

"It depends," laughed Susan, "whether Dusky

minds! I don't see why he should. Go on. You have a shot! If you'd rather do it without your skirt, slip that off and give it to me. There's nobody here to see."

"All right, I will!" laughed Jacqueline: and, slipping off her skirt, she got hold of Dusky's mane. Measuring the distance to his back, she jumped up and easily clambered on. Dusky looked distinctly surprised, but he stood still and, obedient to Jacqueline's legs, he trotted off round the field.

"Meet me at the gate into our garden," Susan called out. She could see at once that Jacqueline had a natural, easy seat.

"He's a good ride, even bareback," Jacqueline commented when she slipped off Dusky's back at the gate into the garden of Ash Court. "Narrower than Evan Bach—suits me better, I think."

They went to look at the stables then, leaving the ponies to get used to each other in the field. Jacqueline was surprised how large the stables were.

"Yes, that's what Father's puzzled about," Susan agreed. "He says our house is old, you know—at least one part of it is—but the old part of it's not much bigger than the stables here. That's what he says he can't understand."

"I shouldn't worry," laughed Jacqueline, "so long as the stables are here—with an orchard opposite, too," she added. "Pear trees, apple trees—gosh!"

"There are two good stalls for the horses here, you see: and this one where Dusky lives when I keep him in, it's got a shute here, see? That leads up to that hole in the roof. I suppose they kept the hay up there and just slid it down," said Susan.

"Useful," said Jacqueline. "And we could slide down that. What's this place next door? Oh, a saddle-room! Gosh! You've got everything."

"There are two more places yet," explained Susan. "This one here beyond the saddle-room is Father's garage now. I suppose it was for a carriage or something before there were motor cars."

"A trap, I expect," said Jacqueline. "Or one of those affairs they called a brougham. You know what I mean, like the back part of a saloon car—all padded inside to deaden the shocks of the road. And what's this wooden shed beyond? A place for a buggy or something else, I suppose."

"Probably," Susan agreed. "But we keep potatoes in it now. We could put a pony in it at a pinch. And we may need it for that if Peter and Ann come with Blaze and Pepper for the Easter holidays. Pepper's a grey, you know, and Blaze is a chestnut like Evan Bach. It's a pity they couldn't come for Christmas, as I asked them to. But Peter's going to Torquay and Ann's too busy at her Riding School. It's disappointing, but I'm jolly glad that you're here, anyhow."

She wasn't prepared for the bombshell that Jacqueline dropped.

"Well, for a week, at any rate," she said. "Then I'm going to stay with an aunt at Coniston."

"You're going . . . !" Susan began; and then, to control her disappointment, she picked up a stone and threw it across the orchard at the elm tree that towered above the apple trees.

"Well! Isn't that just my luck?" she said. "First Ann and Peter can't come; and now you've got to go away

as well. It's going to be pretty lonely for Dusky and me. I'd thought," she added, picking up another stone, "that, as you go hunting now and then—well, I was hoping that one day you could take me along. I know Father wouldn't let me go alone."

She threw the stone and Jacqueline watched it hit an apple tree.

"No; you'd need to have someone the first time," she said. "Someone who knows the ropes—though I'm no wizard at riding to hounds, I know. Still, there's one thing . . ." She hesitated, one finger pulling her lower lip; then, doubtfully she said: "Of course, there's Jimmy and Keith; but neither of them ride. They go on foot, and I don't suppose you'd want to descend to that."

Susan looked at her, surprised.

"Descend?" she said. "Oh, I don't know. Peter told me at Birley that he sometimes went on foot, and he said it was great fun. But would your brother, Jimmy, take me, do you think? I've never met him yet."

Jacqueline smiled her cryptic smile.

"He'd take you all right, don't worry," she said. "But I warn you, you'll have to run for miles and miles. I know what we'll do. Jimmy and Keith are going on the river this afternoon. They wanted me to go with them, but I'm not keen on canoes, especially in the winter-time. Suppose we ride over, you and I, to Wanderby instead? The river runs near Wanderby Abbey, you know; and I could show you that; and I'll tell Jimmy to look out for us there and then I'll introduce you to him and Keith."

Chapter Three

FIRST LOOK AT WANDERBY

THEY set off at ten o'clock by a route which left, as Jacqueline put it, "the beastly roads behind."

"We needn't even go down the drive of your house," she explained. "We can jump the hedge at the end of your paddock there. It isn't high, especially in that corner by the coppice."

Dusky and Evan Bach easily managed the hedge.

"Now," explained Jacqueline, "we're in what people here call Cronkerson's Fields. I've never found out who Cronkerson was, but I'm glad he left us his Fields. They stretch all the way to Wanderby—better than going all through the town and out by that road on our right. Come on! I'll race you across to that gate!"

They galloped across and Susan learned that Evan Bach could certainly go when he liked. But Dusky held his own and they finished neck and neck.

"Bit out of condition!" Susan gasped. "I am, I mean; and Dusky, too, I dare say. Stuffing away at school doesn't give you much practice for a ride."

"It jolly well doesn't," Jacqueline agreed as she opened the gate. "Steady, Evan! He's been eating his head off, too. Now down this hedge to that other gate. Then we've got it all open till we reach that little hill over there—the one with the fir tree on it. Fir Tree Nob, we call it; it's the only fir tree anywhere near

here. From there you'll get your first glimpse of Wanderby."

The canter across to the hill brought the colour to Susan's cheeks.

"Oh, isn't it a lovely day!" she panted as they drew rein beneath the fir. From the knoll on which it grew they could see, to the south, the woods around Wanderby.

"They hide the ruins from here," explained Jacqueline, "but there aren't any trees on the other side, where the river is. Look! Can you see the farm there, through that gap in the trees?"

"Yes," replied Susan. "I see it. But let's get on. I want to get a closer look."

She followed Jacqueline down the other side of Fir Tree Nob to the road, which was only two fields away.

"We shall have to take this road, I'm afraid," said Jacqueline; "but only for a hundred yards or so: it's only a by-road to Stapley."

They trotted the ponies down to the road, which was flanked on its far side by oak and alder woods. In a minute or two they came to a drive on their right, which wound up through the trees.

"This is the way to the ruins," Jacqueline explained. "And this cottage beside the road is where Mr. Briggs lives. Look! There's Mr. Briggs in his garden now, digging away like the rotary digger they have at Wanderby Farm. He's well over sixty, so Father says, and yet he can dig like that. He used to be head-groom to the Marsh's at Diddington Grange, but they left when Diana Marsh got killed—out hunting. She came a cropper at a place called Bicton's Gorse and broke her

neck. A fine horsewoman she was. You ask Mr. Briggs some day. Good morning, Mr. Briggs!" she called out as they rode into the drive from the open road.

Mr. Briggs stopped digging and, with one hand on the small of his back, looked slowly round at them.

"Marnin', Miss Jacqueline," he said. "Fine marnin' for a ride."

He passed a hand through his white, untidy hair.

"Doubt there'll be rain before marnin'!" he commented, his grey eyes searching the skies. "Trust my old back to tell me when that be around."

His glance was appraising Dusky and Evan as he spoke.

"Exercising Evan, eh?" he suggested, with his lean and wrinkled smile. "Not afore it's time, by the look of him."

Jacqueline laughed.

"School," she replied. "You know very well that I've got to leave him when I go to school. So does Susan Cameron here. She's come to live at Ash Court. This is her pony, Dusky. I dare say she'll be riding a lot round here."

Mr. Briggs touched his forehead and his eyes seemed to take in Dusky's points at a glance.

"Welcome, I'm sure," he told Susan. "And that be a nice bit of horseflesh you've got there. Noo Forest, ain't 'ee? Suits you well, 'ee do."

Susan was pleased, but she felt quite glad when Jacqueline, after another word or two, led the way up the grass on one side of the winding, tree-lined drive.

"I like Mr. Briggs," she said, "but he does look at you through and through. I felt as if he were judging

me at a show. Still, I suppose he knows a lot about horses."

"You bet he does," agreed Jacqueline. "He began as a stable-boy, I believe, and never did anything else till old Mr. Marsh died. And the tales he can tell of the hunting they had, and the races, too—point-to-points, you know—round here, and the real races at Chester and Woore! Old Mr. Marsh had one or two good thoroughbreds; and, of course, if you get Briggs talking about the grave of Sulieman he can go on for hours. You've heard about that, I suppose?"

She pulled up Evan Bach as she spoke, at a fork in the drive.

"Not a word," replied Susan. "Who was Sulieman?"

Jacqueline took the right-hand fork.

"Oh, Sulieman was, so the story goes," she said, "a famous thoroughbred of years ago—long before Mr. Marsh's time—somewhere back in the days when the very first Arab stock was brought to be bred in England, so Mr. Briggs says. That would be—when? What Father calls Georgian times, I suppose. But I don't know any history. Bonnie Prince Charlie came down here about then, I think."

Susan knotted her brows in doubt.

"Bonnie Prince Charlie?" she answered. "I didn't know he came round here. I always thought he went down to—where was it?—Derby, wasn't it?—in— Oh, dear! I forget the date—seventeen hundred and something—forty-five, I believe it was—and then funk'd it and went back. But what's Prince Charlie got to do with Sulieman's grave?"

"Nothing," said Jacqueline. "Mind this soft patch

here. We'd better keep on the road: and turn to the right there again just ahead, instead of going up to the farm. No, nothing, so far as I know," she went on. "I was only telling you how old this grave of Sulieman is. When we go round by the Abbey on the way home, you'll see that it's under a sundial near the stables to which the farm is attached. The farm's new, but the stables are jolly old. They've nothing to do with the Abbey, of course. That's a lot older still. But whoever built them—nobody seems to know exactly who did—but whoever built them, he meant his horses to be well looked after, as you'll see. They're a jolly sight better than a lot of houses they build today. There's a mounting block and all that; and, over the stables there is a sort of tower—a cupola, I think it's called—and from there you get a lovely view, because all Wanderby's on a hill. It's one of those glass-sided places, with a map cut out in metal inside, and it shows you everything—Beeston and Peckforton Castles to the north-west and, on a clear day, Chester, too—and Mowcop over Congleton way on the east and the Cheshire Plain to the south, over Church Stretton way, and in the west—well, on a clear day you can just make out the Welsh hills, looking over the River Dee, of course."

"My hat!" exclaimed Susan. "I'll jolly well have to see all that."

She was following Jacqueline now through a glade that skirted the slope of the hill.

"There's the river down there—see?" said Jacqueline; and Susan, looking through the scattered beeches here, saw, across an open field, the River Sel winding lazily past the willows and alders that lined its banks.

"That's where we usually camp," explained Jacqueline, pointing to where the river fetched a loop and widened, at the bend of the loop, into a pool. "As you can see, there's a wide, flat bit of grass down there, and the river's sandy and fairly shallow, except, of course, in the pool where we bathe. Let's ride down and wait for Jimmy and Keith. I told them we'd wait for them here."

They cantered down the grassy slope to the river bank. Dusky and Evan sniffed the air when they came to the water's edge.

"Let's get off here for a minute," Jacqueline suggested, "and give the ponies a drink. It's quite shallow for them in that sandy sort of bay."

They dismounted and, while the ponies had a drink, Jacqueline pointed out the brook that bounded the field. It had alder trees at intervals along its banks and it entered the river a little higher up, just beyond a willow tree. The river made a sharp bend here and widened into a pool.

"That's one of the places where we bathe," said Jacqueline, "and, come to think of it, that brook, Wanderby Brook, we call it, would be fine for practising jumps. If you look back, you can just see the roof of the stables I told you about—with the cupola sticking out of it, over the trees there, see? The Abbey, or the little bit that's left of it, is out of sight from here, but when we ride home I'll take you round that way and then you'll get a glimpse of it. Plenty to explore," she added as she pulled Evan away from his drink.

"It's absolutely wonderful!" Susan replied. "Oh, I do wish the summer would come; I can just see us camp-

ing here, you and me and Peter and Ann and Jimmy and . . . I say! Is this Jimmy coming up the river now?"

Jacqueline looked down the river and waved a hand.

"Yes; that's Jimmy," she said. "Hoy, Jimmy! We beat you to it, then?"

Jimmy, who was paddling a white two-seater canvas canoe, lowered his double paddle and let the canoe drift.

"Of course you did," he replied. "You didn't have to paddle against this stream. The mill at Selbury's open and the one at Bitterton upstream there must be open too. Keith's half-dead back there with his heavy wooden canoe."

Jacqueline frowned.

"Then why didn't you let him have the lighter one?" she said. "Poor Keith! Keith is only half the size of Jimmy," she said to Susan, "although he's very strong. This is Susan Cameron," she continued to Jimmy. "You know—from Ash Court."

Jimmy grinned and brought his canoe alongside the bank.

"Jacqueline's told me about you," he said. "Are you keen on canoes? They're better than a pony any day."

For this he got another frown from Jacqueline.

"Don't expect any manners from Jimmy," she said. "Oh, here's Keith. Keith!" she shouted. "You ought to have made Jimmy take that heavy canoe."

But Keith, who was wiping the sweat from his forehead, only laughed.

"No fear!" he replied. "That thing's got no speed and it yaws all over the place."

He brought his canoe to the bank and Susan was introduced.

"As different as two boys could be," thought Susan as she looked down at them. Jimmy was dark, like Jacqueline, with the same grey, widely-set eyes, but his forehead was broader under his tousled hair. His shoulders were broad and the rolled-up sleeves of his white shirt showed the powerful muscles of his arms. Keith, beside him, looked so small in his big canoe that Susan wondered how he could manage it; but his thin, bony features, topped by a shock of brown hair, had a quiet intensity that awakened Susan's interest.

"Saw a lovely kingfisher on the way up," he was telling Jacqueline. "A real corker—just like a streak of light it went, skimming over the water under the trees; and, as I was resting under a tree, two water-voles came along to wash their faces on the tree's roots."

He was trailing one hand in the water as he spoke and his eyes were on his hand.

"But I dare say Susan isn't keen on animals," he said.

"Except horses," Jimmy laughed. "But I must admit that's a jolly nice pony you've got there, Susan. What's his name?"

"Dusky," said Susan. "And to return the compliment, that's a jolly nice canoe of yours."

Jimmy was pleased.

"You must come and have a go in it," he said. "But not now, if you don't mind. Keith and I want to get up to the mill at Bitterton if we can."

He had pushed his canoe away from the bank, and Keith, with a smile at Susan and a muttered "Excuse us," also pushed off and followed Jimmy up the river

and round the bend just ahead of them. Jacqueline laughed.

"Now you know Jimmy and Keith," she said. "I've asked Jimmy to take you out hunting on foot some time when I'm away."

She mounted Evan Bach and waited for Susan to mount. "You could go out," she added, "with him and Keith in the canoes as well if you like."

Susan looked after the vanishing canoes.

"I'm not sure that I want to," she said. "They look pretty rocky to me. I'm sure I should upset."

"Not you," replied Jacqueline as they walked the ponies away from the river bank. "All you've got to learn is the trick of it. It's rather like learning to ride a bike, you know; and a lot less difficult than learning to ride a horse. You can swim, I suppose? Father doesn't like people using our canoes unless they can."

Susan explained that she'd learnt to swim at school.

"We have to learn to swim in our clothes," she said. "I love swimming. Next to riding, I think it's the best sport."

"Pretty good," agreed Jacqueline. "We bathed a lot in the river in the summer, of course. Jolly good bathing, really—not like the seaside, of course, but the river bottom's all sand and, just where we camp, as I expect you saw, there's quite a lot of it, quite enough to bury yourself if you like, especially when the water's low. That happens when the mill at Bitterton—the one that Jimmy and Keith are off to now—shuts up its gates and the mill at Selbury doesn't, so it drains all the water off. Sometimes, in winter, the river floods the fields and then

Jimmy and Keith go out on the floods—pretty chilly sort of fun, I think.”

“I should think it would be,” Susan agreed. “Jimmy looked cold just now. His hands were blue and . . .”

“Blue!” laughed Jacqueline. “More like dirty, you mean. But look here—we’d better be moving, hadn’t we? I don’t know how you feel, but I shouldn’t object if somebody gave me a cup of tea.”

Chapter Four

A DAY WITH THE HUNT

AFTER that ride, the idea of a summer camp at Wanderby did much to reconcile Susan to the long wait till the summer came. She rode over to Wanderby by herself several times after Jacqueline had gone to Coniston.

"Nobody seems to mind me riding about there pretty well as I like," she told her mother after one of these trips. "I had a talk to old Mr. Briggs, and he's a dear. He's full of all sorts of tales about hunting round about here. And today I met Mr. Drake for the first time. He's the farmer at Wanderby Farm, you know. He was awfully nice. He took me all over the stables and showed me the mounting block, and Sulieman's grave, where that famous racehorse is buried under the little urn. And after that we went inside that watch-tower sort of place, on top of the stables. It's got a map on a stand—one of those copper plates with all the sights of the district marked, but, of course, it was much too misty today and we couldn't see very much."

And what made Wanderby more interesting still to Susan was her father's surprising interest in its history.

"I've been reading a lot about it," he told Susan and Mrs. Cameron. "A lot about Selbury, too. It seems that the Abbey at Wanderby was broken up at the Dissolution—in 1536—when Henry the Eighth suppressed such a lot of monasteries; and all the Abbey's property

would, I suppose, have been given away by the King to various people, or annexed to the Crown; even the stone it was built of was probably sold, later on, to build other places; but there's one thing about this Abbey that puzzles me. There are hints here and there in what I've read—nothing really definite, but hints enough to make me think about it seriously—that the Abbey possessed, before Henry closed it down, a chalice of gold, which would be, if I've got things right, the very greatest treasure of the place. . . .”

He paused with a smile at the look on Susan's face.

“I thought that would interest you!” he chaffed. “But it interests me as well, Susan,” he went on. “It'll interest everyone else, too, if my idea of this chalice is correct—everyone, I mean, who has any interest at all in the history of the Church—not because the chalice was made of gold—that doesn't matter, of course. The Abbey was rich and one gold cup wouldn't be either here nor there; but there was—at least, I think so—some special religious value attached to this cup—and it vanished—I mean, before the Dissolution occurred—that's the peculiar thing. . . .”

“Do you mean,” asked Susan, “that somebody stole it? Or what?”

Her father shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

“It might have been stolen, of course,” he said. “I thought at first that King Henry's people took it away. They made up lists of everything the abbeyes possessed, or at any rate they were supposed to do that; but the odd thing about this chalice is, as I've just said, that it disappeared before the Abbey was dissolved—not long before then, but certainly before what they called the

Visitation: you know, when the people Henry appointed actually came to Wanderby to do their job. Of that much I feel quite sure. What may have happened, it seems to me, is that somebody at the Abbey—somebody in authority—the Abbot himself, I dare say, hid the chalice as soon as he knew the Abbey was certain to be dissolved. He might have—well, he could have buried it; or he might have given it, because of its great religious significance, to somebody to keep. . . .”

“To another Abbey, you mean?” asked Mrs. Cameron.

“Well, possibly, yes,” her husband agreed. “They weren’t quite all dissolved, you know; but I think it more likely, myself, that the old Abbot wouldn’t have risked it going to another church—not till the trouble was over, at any rate.”

He finished the tea in his cup and began to fill a pipe.

“But don’t, of course,” he said to Susan, “go thinking all sorts of things because of what I’ve just said. I don’t mean there’s buried treasure, for example, to be found. This chalice interests me—for archæological reasons. The whole Abbey’s interesting, it seems to me. I’ve a strong suspicion it was built on the site of an old Saxon fort; and before that there may have been something Roman there; so that if we started some diggings there, we might find—well . . .”

“Roman coins,” put in Susan, “or brooches and things. We learn about those at school. I say, Daddy, it would be rather fun to see what we can find. Couldn’t we go there in the summer and camp? With Peter and Ann and Jimmy and Jacqueline and Keith? We could all help and we might find lots of things.”

Her father laughed.

"With the ponies, too, I suppose?" he said. "And fun in the canoes as well? I should get a lot of help with the digging, I can see! But still, I don't see why we shouldn't camp. . . ."

"Whizzo!" exclaimed Susan. "Then can I write to Peter and Ann and ask them to come?"

"Yes," said her father. "You could all go and camp there, anyhow, if you'd like to, whether we do any digging or not."

It was all arranged by the end of that week. Both Peter and Ann could come. Peter wrote that he'd have to bring Blaze by train, though his father had suggested that there might be a horse-box going to Chester which might agree to go by way of Selbury. "But I'll get to you somehow, don't you worry," he ended up.

Ann replied that, luckily for her, she would be at Leintwardine in August, when Susan wanted her to come. "I'll be staying with an aunt there," she explained, "for part of my holiday, and I shouldn't wonder if I could trek over to Selbury from there. I'll let you know when the time comes. Anyway, count me in for the digging. That's certain to be fun."

Susan showed her father and mother the letters as soon as they came.

"I must go and tell Jimmy and Keith, too," she said, "and make sure that they'll help. I know! I'll ask them on Saturday, Mother. They've asked me to go with them to the Meet. I do hope that it's going to be all right on foot."

"Of course it will be," her mother replied. "You couldn't have gone on Dusky, anyhow, because Jimmy

and Keith can't ride. I must see that your heaviest shoes are all right; and let me know what you'll need in the way of sandwiches."

Susan, doubtful still about hunting on foot, found, when Saturday came, that it wasn't half so dull as she suspected it might be. The Meet was at Wimbury, three miles out, and Dr. Clement, who had patients to see near there, had offered to take them as far as the Meet in his car.

"After that it'll have to be Shanks's pony," he said. "Jimmy and Keith will look after you. They know this country like the palms of their dirty hands."

The day dawned fine, with a nip in the air and a cloudless sky.

"The glass is high," the doctor told them as they drove out to Wimbury. "You'll have a good day, and the full moon will help you on your long trek home. Got some sandwiches, Susan, and a good pair of boots? You'll need them both if they have any sort of a run. All the world seems to have a nag today," he added as they passed a farm, in rat-catcher rig, jogging to the Meet on a sturdy cob. From time to time they passed other horsemen and horsewomen, too, some of them following the road they were on, some coming in from by-roads, drifts and lanes, all of them spick and span, with men or women riders dressed for the Hunt. There were people on bicycles, too, and a good many on foot, most of them country folk.

"It's surprising," the doctor said, "how many people find they have business in the place where the hounds meet."

At the Meet itself they found the hounds assembled

on the village green. The red coats of the Members of the Hunt, the excited scurry of hounds with their eager eyes and waving sterns, the Huntsman with his horn and the Whipper-in, they all made Susan's pulses quicken as she watched.

"There's old Hanby, the Master," Jimmy explained. "No, not the thin-faced, scraggy chap—that's the Earl of Selbury. Hanby's the beak-nosed, red-faced one——Gosh! There's his sister, too—over there by the church. She's the one to watch if you want to learn how to ride to hounds—if you ever get near enough to her, I mean. That kid there on the grey is Sophie, one of Jacqueline's pals."

Susan longed for Dusky and a stirrup for each foot. But she hadn't much time for longings, because the Hunt very soon moved off.

"Wimbury Gorse," said Jimmy, watching them. "That's where they'll draw first. Susan, you're lucky; they generally find a fox there. Stand back in this gateway and watch the hounds go by."

Susan was thrilled as Fred, the Huntsman, riding a powerful grey, came first with the eager hounds all milling round his horse's hooves. Then came the Whippers-in and, a little behind them, the Master, Mr. Hanby, his red face beaming in the wintry sun. The Hunt followed him twenty yards or so behind.

"Gosh! This is the way to see hunters!" Susan exclaimed as the long trail of horses went walking by. At the very end came a little boy, on a Shetland pony, led by a groom.

"Not much bigger than a Newfoundland dog,"

Jimmy commented. "He won't jump many fences on that little thing."

"Come on!" ordered Jimmy. "Let's get out of all this. Over that gate by the shed over there and I'll take you a short-cut to the Gorse."

He led them over the gate and Susan could see, from the field beyond it, the long line of the Hunt ahead of them on the road. She ran after Jimmy and, by cutting across another field, they came within view of the Gorse before the hounds got near to it.

"Stop here!" ordered Jimmy. "We mustn't get too close. We're all right on this upwind side, but Hanby would skin us alive if we got downwind and spoil the run."

They stood on a gate one field away from the Gorse.

"There they go in," said Jimmy as they saw the Huntsman put the hounds into the little wood.

"Listen to them barking . . ." Susan began, but Jimmy cut her short.

"Quiet," he ordered. "And hounds don't bark; they speak. Look, there's the Whipper-in collecting that skirter over there. I wonder if they'll find. If they don't, I expect they'll try Wilbury Covert next."

But they did find. Suddenly the note of the hounds changed into a deep, excited baying that made Susan's pulses race.

"They've found!" cried Keith. "They've found and they're off! Look! There's the leader! And the pack—and that fellow there with his cap in the air. Downwind as usual. Making for Buckley Woods, isn't he, Jimmy? Come on! Let's get a move on or they'll leave us behind."

They began to run.

"More to the left," ordered Jimmy. "Make for Lenbury Brook. A lot of them always come croppers crossing that."

They ran as hard as they could across two fields to a little knoll that overlooked a valley through which the pack were now running fast. Halfway across it there was a bullfinch hedge and Susan was just in time to see Fred, the Huntsman, crash through its upper branches on his powerful grey. The Master followed and some of the others too, but most of them went to the right and through a gate in the corner of the field. Jimmy had run to a fence on their left and, standing on it, he called them to him excitedly.

"Oh, hurry!" he shouted. "They're jumping the brook—and one of 'em's in already. Oh, quick! You'll miss it all!"

Susan and Keith both ran for their lives.

"Crumbs!" exclaimed Susan at the sight that met her eyes. In the valley below she could see horses jumping a brook that was swollen with winter rains. One horse was in the brook and its red-coated rider on the bank was holding on to the reins and trying to get it out. Another was running after his horse, his tall hat dangling absurdly behind him on its cord. Jimmy let out a loud laugh as a farmer's horse refused and the farmer went head first into the brook.

"Brr-r-r!" cried Susan. "I'll bet that's cold!"

And they watched the farmer, spattering water, scrambling out. The rest of the horses got over as they watched, though some of the riders preferred to go round by a bridge higher up the stream. The hounds

and the Master had vanished up the slope beyond; they could just be heard beyond a hill that shut out their view of the country over by Buckley Woods.

"Come on!" said Jimmy. "No use staying here. If we want to see them kill we'd better run."

And he set off for the bridge across the brook.

It was then that Susan learnt how Jimmy could run. He set such a pace that neither she nor Keith could keep up with him: but they kept him in view as he led them over the hill and then waved his arm to direct them to the right.

"They're turning into the wind," they heard him shouting, "about a mile away. That means a sinking fox, so hurry if you want to see a kill!"

Susan ran as she had never run before. Over two meadows they went and along the headlands of a big, ploughed field and then, to her relief, Jimmy took them down a narrow driftway to the right as far as a little wood. Plunging into the wood, he brought them out to see, to their disappointment, the hounds in the distance, questing over a big expanse of plough.

"Lost him!" said Jimmy disgustedly. "They'll find no scent on that."

But even as he uttered the words, a hound spoke on the edge of the field and the next minute the whole pack followed him.

"Good boy, Rover!" the Huntsman cried and, sounding his horn, he led the pack after him.

"Golly! They're coming to this wood!" cried Jimmy. "Quick, get out of here. We mustn't head him off."

But there was no need; for a man in a motor car

down the road caught sight of the fox and set up such a hullabaloo of shouting and sounding of his motor horn that the fox turned right across their line of sight. They caught a glimpse of him then—just a fleeting glimpse of a dark-red shape with a lolling tongue, as it flashed along the shelter of a hedge.

“Drat that fellow!” said Jimmy angrily. “He ought to know better than kick up a row like that. It’s bad enough spoiling the scent with petrol smells; but to do that . . . ! That fox’ll get away now. Look! All the hounds are at fault again.”

They eagerly watched, as did the Hunt behind the Master and Huntsman. But the hounds were confused and, though Jimmy ran out into the field in front of him and waved his cap and pointed the way the fox had gone, the Huntsman did not notice him. He was casting widely for the line and all his attention was on his hounds. Then suddenly a skirter spoke way out on Jimmy’s right.

“Drat!” exclaimed Jimmy. “That can’t be the line of the fox we saw just now. He must have crossed another line and—— Drat it! Yes, the pack’s gone after that.”

He was right, for the Huntsman had turned, and he and the Master and all the Hunt went off on the new line. In less than a minute they’d all gone out of sight.

“Well, isn’t that just like hunting!” Keith said rather disgustingly. “Now we shall never pick them up again.”

“You bet we will,” objected Jimmy. “At any rate, we can try. Come on! Let’s try to find Rhodes. He’s sure to know which way they’re likely to have gone.”

He led them back into the road and Susan asked him why Rhodes was likely to know.

"Well, he's the terrier-man. He's got to know," said Jimmy as they dropped into the road. "Now, which way . . . ?" He hesitated, and then spoke to a farmer who was passing on a cob.

"Excuse me, Mr. Johnson," he said. "But which way have they gone, do you think? Is there any chance of picking them up again?"

"Not for me there isn't," said Mr. Johnson with a smile. "I came a cropper at that oxer near the start and old Mary's gone lame, as you see. But I should say — Now let me see? If you were to make over Bursley Heath and work down to Maiston Gorse — I saw Bill Rhodes going that way with the terrier, anyway."

"Oh, Rhodes went that way, did he?" Jimmy replied. "Thanks, Mr. Johnson. We'll follow him. Pity they didn't break that fox just now."

Mr. Johnson grinned.

"Ah, that's the way of things," he said. "Crossed another line he did and, like them chaps in the Government offices, passed the trouble on to the other fox."

He rode off chuckling at his joke; and Jimmy, following, turned to the right up a drift that took them up a slope on to Bursley Heath. He moved at a steady lope that never seemed to leave him out of breath.

"Gosh! You can run!" panted Susan. "Couldn't we have a rest, or at least walk up this hill?"

But Jimmy wouldn't slacken his pace. "If we don't hurry, they'll kill—or go off somewhere else," he said.

On the heath itself, however, they did pause, because there they could see a good deal of the countryside ahead.

"See any red-coats bobbing?" Jimmy enquired. "Or

motor cars moving along a road, or people in the fields? Yes. Look! There! On that church tower! I can see a lot of people crowded there!"

They looked where he pointed to the south and, sure enough, there were people on the tower.

"And I can see a line of motor cars," Susan said. "There, on the right of the church, between that haystack and that clump of trees."

Jimmy agreed.

"Then wait," he counselled. "And listen, all of you! Keep your ears skinned for the note of the horn. If you see a horse . . ."

His eyes were darting here and there through puckered lids.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "Those sheep are all huddled there. That often means there's a fox nearby. And listen! Isn't that a magpie scolding there, too? Rhodes once told me they often give you a line on a fox that way."

They all stood watching and listening for a moment or two. Then faintly, because they were upwind, they heard, now coming from their left, the sound of a distant horn.

"Didn't I tell you. . ." Jimmy said; and Susan suddenly threw up a hand to point.

"Look!" she told them. "There! Down there coming out from behind those woods. A red-coat! It's them! It's them! And look! They're in full cry!"

It was, indeed, a wonderful sight, a sight that made Susan dance with excitement as she watched. Across their view, in the light of the midday sun, the whole Hunt galloped, hounds ahead of them, over the green

of the fields spread out below. Red coats, white breeches, grey horses, chestnuts, browns and blacks, they took the fences as they came, and nobody came to grief in that magnificent run. Jimmy was silent; Keith was silent: and "Oh, to have Dusky now!" thought Susan, holding her breath as she watched. For a good five minutes it lasted, this bird's-eye view of the run. Then the hounds and the red-coats and flying horses passed out of sight behind a wood beneath them on the edge of the heath.

"Oh, wouldn't that just be our luck!" said Jimmy disgustedly. "We'll never catch them again now—not at the pace they're going at. Our only chance is that something—anything—I don't care what, might turn the fox our way."

But nothing did. They stood there another few minutes, watching the stragglers trying to make up the ground they had lost. Then suddenly they heard a sound, a sound that every huntsman hopes for, and yet feels sad to hear.

"They've killed!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Behind that wood. Listen to those hounds. They're breaking up their fox!"

He looked at Susan and Susan was surprised by the look in his eyes. It was sad, triumphant, frustrated all at once.

"I'm sorry," said Jimmy. "I meant you to see a kill; and, if you'd been on a horse, of course, you might have been first woman up, and then you might have got the mask, or at least a pad."

He broke off, ashamed of his failure.

"But we can't always be lucky," he said. "Perhaps next time . . ."

"Perhaps," cut in Susan gazing down at the wood. But she didn't tell Jimmy the thought in her mind. She wasn't certain, by any means, that she'd wanted to see that gallant fox die suddenly in the sunshine, behind that peaceful wood.

Chapter Five

TERRIER-MAN AND SUFFOLK FOAL

THEY decided then that the best thing they could do was to go down and try to find out where the Hunt had gone. By great good luck they came upon Rhodes, the terrier-man, in the road below. He was snatching a hurried sandwich on the hedge bank underneath a tree. Jimmy gave him a grin and asked him what had happened after the kill.

"They'n gone o'er to Charnley Cross for a bite o' lunch," said Rhodes. "Master mostly stops there when he's out this way. Then they'll draw Charnley Covert, I reckon and, if they find—well, with this wind, I doubt the fox might take them to Lackerton."

Jimmy frowned.

"Good gosh!" he said. "Lackerton would be a long way to walk home."

"Tidy way," agreed Rhodes. "Bout fifteen mile, I'd say. Might be," he added, as he threw a bit of his sandwich to Jack, his terrier—"might be that the fox'll run this way. It has been known, though it ain't likely, I doubt."

"The way that terrier's eating," Jimmy said, "reminds me that I've got some sandwiches here."

"Me too," said Susan, who, since the excitement of the kill, had realized how terribly hungry she was.

"Room for ye on the bank here," invited Rhodes. "I like a bit of company myself."

So they settled down beside him, and Susan asked whether she could give something to the terrier.

"So long as it ain't too much," said Rhodes. "Don't work well, 'e don't, if he gets too much to eat. Eating time for him is when we get home. Ain't it, Jack?" he said, patting the dog. "Nice bit o' horse-meat waiting at home for you. Don't do for me neither to eat too much on this job. Ain't no second horse for me, not like the Master and them. They'll be looking for their second mounts at Charnley—them as has 'em will."

Susan looked at his weatherbeaten face and mud-bespattered bicycle.

"I don't know how you keep up with the hounds," she said. "They run so fast and you have to go by the roads."

"Them and the lanes and drifts," agreed Rhodes. "Yer lives and learns the lanes and drifts, as Mr. Jimmy here knows. Reckon he knows a thing or two about the roads hisself."

Jimmy was pleased. Praise from Rhodes, he felt, was praise indeed.

"Oh, I don't know," he pretended to protest. "I often get left behind. If it wasn't for watching you, I'd never know where to run."

He threw the end of his sandwich to the terrier.

"Remember," he added, "that run last season out Diddington way, when the fox got up the chimney at Boxton Rectory?"

Mr. Rhodes laughed.

"Don't I remember it!" he said. "Old Jack here warn't no use for that. If a fox goes to earth, there ain't a better terrier anywhere to rout 'im out; but, when it's

a chimbley—well, they never did get that one out o' that. Rector were too soft-'earted, I reckon. Anyways, the Master let un bide."

He told them of that wonderful run.

"Started at Bicton's Gorse, it did," he said. "Same place as where Miss Marsh wor killed. A strange thing that, for a finer horsewoman never rode to hounds. But that's by the way. This run I'm speakin' of were as fast a run as ever I've had to follow in all me days. It wor all I could do to be in at the end, going around, as I had to, by Wiston and Henbury Heath; and I mind the fox wor sinking fast when I caught up. But the luck was his, for he ran, so they told me, straight into the garden of the Rectory. The owd cook there, she saw 'im—straight in the eye she looked at 'im, she said, and the poor crittur, she told me, 'e looked as if he knew 'is last minnut 'ad come. Then 'is eye, so Cook said, lit on a wash'ouse sort of place they 'ad, and Cook, 'er made me laugh, for 'er said that, when 'e spotted the wash'ouse, the fox, the old cunning, he looked back at the 'unt and then he giv 'er a wink. Into the wash'ouse like a streak o' light 'e went, and the next minute was over the boiler and up the gurt chimbley be'ind. Up comes the 'ounds, says Cook, and over the lawn and into the wash'ouse too; and then what a 'ow-de-do! Rector, 'e nearly 'ad a fit; and, o' course, the Master and Fred, the 'untsman and what was left of the 'unt came gallopin' up. When I got there meself they was 'aving a conference in the drive. Rector, 'e was all for the fox; Master, 'e was for getting 'im out; but 'e 'ad to agree that I couldn't put Jack 'ere up that chimbley stack. So in the end the Rector won: and we left the owd fox

there to find 'is own way out. Never see'd that afore, I 'adn't—fox up a chimbley—no, I'd never seen that afore."

He chuckled to himself and glanced at his watch.

"Lordy! Ten-past two!" he exclaimed. "I mun be off. The Master said 'e'd draw the Charnley Covert at half-past two."

He got up, put Jack, the terrier, in the basket on the handlebars of his bicycle and, waving a hand, went off up the winding road.

"Ten-past two!" repeated Susan. "No wonder we were peckish when we stopped."

Jimmy was gazing up at the sky. "Two hours more of daylight," he said. "I doubt if we'd better go on. We're a good ten miles from Selbury, I should say."

He looked at them each in turn to find out what they felt.

"I vote we wait a bit here," said Keith. "We can't get to Charnley in time for the draw, and if they go off to Lackerton, well, we couldn't keep up with them: but they might come this way, as Rhodes said. What about walking up Charnley way to see if we can get a glimpse of them?"

They decided on that; but they hadn't gone far before they met a mud-bespattered horseman coming back.

"Do you mind telling me," Jimmy asked him, "whether the Hunt are drawing Charnley now?"

The horseman shook his head and smiled.

"They drew that blank," he said, "but they put up a fox in a mangold field a bit further on and he's taken them over Bacton way, too far afield for me. I've got to be getting home."

Jimmy thanked him, and he and Keith agreed that Bacton was too far for them to run.

"It's right over there," explained Jimmy to Susan, pointing to the west, "and actually on the way home if we fetched a big round, but we shouldn't see much and I don't suppose they'll draw again. It's getting late, you know. And, of course," he ended, "there's always a chance—a pretty slim one, I admit, that they might work round—even from Bacton—towards us on the way home. I think we'd better give it up and start off home."

They set off, therefore, on their ten-mile walk to Selbury.

"Oh, if only I had Dusky," Susan thought for the twentieth time that day. As the afternoon wore on and the sky slowly darkened, there were various signs that the Hunt was over and that members of it were finding their way home. In the village of Rushton, through which they passed at half-past three, two horse-boxes overtook them and beyond the village occasional men and women on tired horses came trickling in by the by-roads from the west. The sunset was brilliant in the sky. Keith, as he walked, kept making remarks about its wonderful shades of red and pink and the way they merged into the fading blue overhead.

"I'd like to have a shot at painting that," he said.

But Jimmy hadn't much use for paints.

"You and your stuff about art," he said. "What I see in it is frost, and the more frost the better, if you ask me. We might get some skating at Wanderby if it freezes hard enough. Did Jacqueline explain," he asked

Susan, "when she showed you over Wanderby, that, in the winter, that field where we camp gets flooded now and then and, when the floods go down, they often leave a flash or two and they're jolly good for skating on when they freeze."

"By 'flash,' " explained Keith, "he means a sheet of water left by the floods. Which reminds me, Jimmy, we'd better take Susan out on the floods in the canoes when they come."

They fell to talking about Wanderby, and Susan told them what her father had said about the plan to do some digging there in the summer holidays. Keith was very much interested in that.

"I've never done any actual digging," he said: "but I've read a bit about it. I thought they always went for Roman pots and things."

"Pots!" snorted Jimmy. "I think it's silly—this digging for things gone long ago."

He was more interested when Susan told him about the golden chalice that had been lost.

"That would be worth digging up," he agreed. "But you've got about as much chance of finding that as of finding the moon."

"If it's buried at all," agreed Susan, "but who says it is?"

Jimmy flung her a quick glance.

"Where d'you expect to find it, then?" he asked. "Still," he continued, with a shrug, "if you people like to be mad, I don't mind giving a hand."

They were plodding along in the moonlight now and, spotting a farmhouse light ahead of them, Keith reminded Jimmy that this was where they'd once had

buttermilk on their way home from the hunt the year before.

"By jingo! Yes!" agreed Jimmy. "They gave us some apples too. Come on. Let's go and try our luck again."

They turned in at the farm gate; but as they approached the farm itself, which stood back from the road, they saw that an outside light lit up the yard and two men were talking outside a stable door. One of them was short and tubby and Jimmy recognized him at once.

"That's Watson, the vet., from Selbury," he said. "And look! That's his car at the other end of the yard. Everybody knows that old Riley of his. I wonder what's up? If the vet.'s here, I wonder if we ought to bother them?"

But the tall man talking to Watson had seen them, and Watson, seeing the frown on his face, turned round to look at them as well.

"Hello, Jimmy," he said with his genial smile. "What brings you here? And Keith? This is Dr. Clement's son, Mr. Lockley," he explained to the tall man, "the doctor's son, from Selbury, you know."

"Ah, the doctor's son," said the farmer, his face relaxing into a friendly smile.

"It's always like that," thought Jimmy, "when anyone mentions Father's name."

He felt very proud of his father and decided, as he'd often done before, that he'd be a country doctor when he grew up.

"And this is Keith Willoughby," Mr. Watson was saying. "And this young lady . . .?" He hesitated.

"Susan Cameron," Jimmy explained, "from Ash Court. We've been following the hounds on foot and on our way home, well——" He looked at the farmer with an apologetic grin. "We remembered," he went on, "that—once, last year, when we'd been following the hounds like this, they gave us a glass of buttermilk. . . ."

He stopped, and the farmer laughed.

"Buttermilk!" Mr. Lockley said. "Is that what ye're after, eh? Well, go on up to the dairy, and the Missus mebbe will give you some, if the pigs ain't had it all."

They all thanked him, and were moving away when Mr. Watson asked them whether the Hunt had killed.

"Yes, once," replied Jimmy. "Over the other side of Bursley Heath: and then they went to Charnley Cross, but we left them there, because they went Bacton way."

Mr. Watson looked at the farmer and then at each of them in turn.

"Do you mean you've walked from Charnley, then?" he said. "That's a good six miles and," he added to the farmer, "they've been running all day. No wonder they're thirsty and four miles to go. I'd better give you all a lift home in my car."

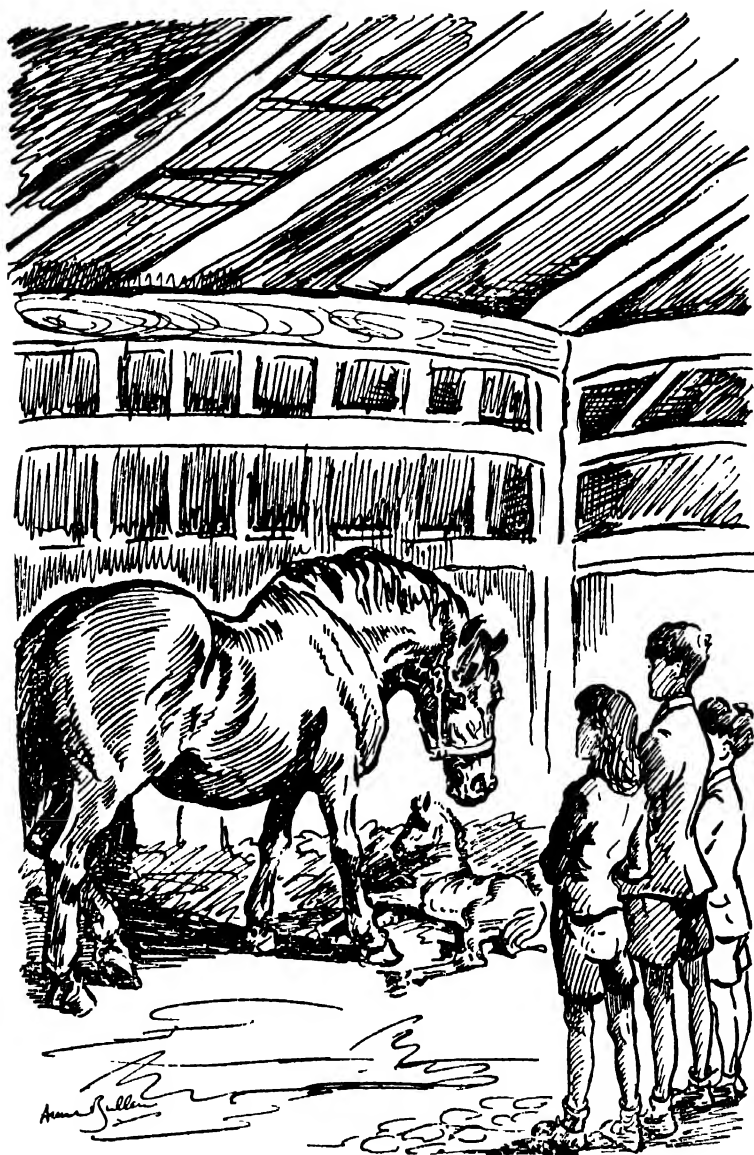
Jimmy frowned.

"Well, thanks very much," he replied. "But really Keith and I can walk. I don't know about Susan . . ."

Mr. Watson laughed.

"The weaker sex, you mean?" he said. "Well, you go and get your buttermilk: and then all of you come back to my car."

He turned, to the farmer, and Susan, as she followed



A tiny Suffolk Punch foal.

Jimmy and Keith, heard him say: "Now, about this foal. . . ."

She couldn't hear any more.

"I say!" she told Jimmy, when she caught up with him. "Did you hear what he said? They're talking about a foal. Oh, I wonder if they'd let us see it after we've had our buttermilk?"

Jimmy walked on steadily. "After it, if you like," he said, "but dashed if I will before."

He wasn't much interested when Susan, thanking Mrs. Lockley for the buttermilk, asked her about the foal.

"What? Didn't they tell you about it?" Mrs. Lockley said. "My husband didn't? I'm surprised at that. He's as proud of it, he is, as if it were his own child. But then, they never think, don't men. You come along with me when you've finished your milk and I'll get them to let you have a peep at it. But only a peep—remember that. And you'll have to be quiet, you know."

Susan promised they wouldn't make a sound; and, telling Jimmy to hurry up with his milk, she gulped down her own and followed Mrs. Lockley down to the yard.

"Fred," she said to her husband, "you've just got to let these children see the foal. I wonder you didn't do it afore. It won't hurt, will it, if they have just a peep?"

Mr. Lockley smiled, though it wasn't his usual cordial smile.

"If they're very quick and quiet," he said, and, taking a stable lamp, he opened the stable door. They tiptoed into the stable after him and there, lying on the straw in its mother's stall, was a tiny Suffolk Punch

foal, all legs and head, so it seemed to Susan, legs and head and a small body of the chestnut colour that Suffolk Punches always have. It blinked in the light of the stable lamp that Mr. Watson was shading with his hand.

"What a perfect darling!" Susan said when they'd left the stable again. "I've never seen a foal so young. Can it stand up? I wish I could come and see it when it goes out into the field."

Mr. Lockley gave her a pleased look.

"Well, that you can," he said; "but it won't be a while yet."

"In a few weeks," Mr. Watson suggested. "After Christmas, perhaps. I don't think you ought to bother Mr. Lockley till then."

He didn't tell them what a struggle he'd had on the night when the foal had been born.

Chapter Six

ANN AND PETER COME TO CAMP

SUSAN wrote to Ann and Peter about the foal and the S day on foot with the hounds. In the same letter she told them that her father had got permission for the digging at Wanderby.

"It's all fixed for August," she wrote; "so mind that nothing happens to prevent you coming to help. The worst of it is, it's such a long time ahead."

But school took up most of the long wait and, when she came home for the Easter holidays, her father was keener than ever about the history of Wanderby.

"I've been to Chester," he told Susan as they ate their hot cross buns on Good Friday afternoon, "and, rooting about in the Library there, I found out that after King Henry took all its stuff in 1536, the Abbey was derelict till about 1730, and most of its stone was sold. That's why there is so little of it left, I suppose. But somewhere about 1740, I believe—and this part will interest you—a fellow named Durham built the stables that are still there. He built them for his Arab stock."

"What? Arab horses at Wanderby?" Susan exclaimed. "Oh, how exciting! But I didn't know they were brought to England so long ago as that."

"Oh, yes, they were," her father explained. "I've been looking into their history. I never thought," he laughed, "that horses would help me with archæology,

but these Arabs—well, they've given me an important clue. Because Durham was one of the very first to bring them to England, you know."

Susan was thoroughly interested now.

"But he didn't race them, surely?" she asked. "And he couldn't have hunted, could he? Was there any racing or hunting then?"

Mr. Cameron took a bite of his hot cross bun.

"Plenty," he said as he munched the bun. "Sir Charles Frederick, in a book called *Fox-hunting*, one of the books in the Lonsdale Library, says that, as early as 1666, Lord Lowther took his hounds from Lowther in Westmorland to hunt what is now the Cottesmore country in Rutlandshire, and that Leicestershire was hunted by Mr. T. Boothby from 1698 to 1753; and, anyway, the great Meynell, Master of the Quorn for fifty years, and John Warde of Kent, the 'Father of Foxhunters', as they called him, who kept hounds for fifty-six years, both flourished from 1752 or thereabouts. So you see, there must have been a lot of hunting in England then—in Leicestershire and Kent, anyway. As a matter of fact, I read in a book on Cheshire by F. H. Crossley that there was, up in Cheshire here, a Tarporley Hunt in 1762."

"What, so near to us as that?" put in Mrs. Cameron. "Tarporley is only twelve or fifteen miles from here."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Cameron. "And, what's more. Did you know, Susan, that there were races in Cheshire as early as 1729? I shouldn't wonder at all if there weren't actually races here in Selbury."

"What? Here?" exclaimed Susan. "Oh, I wonder where the racecourse was?"

Mr. Cameron smiled.

"Well, I don't suppose," he said, "that it was a racecourse like the ones we see now. Probably more like a point-to-point: and over a pretty long course. The place called Six Mile Bottom, near Newmarket, for example, was where the six-mile post for the Newmarket Races was. They raced at Newmarket, too, in those days, of course."

He drank up his tea and passed his cup for more.

"Durham, I shouldn't wonder," he said, as he felt for his pipe, "not only kept these Arabs, but bred them too. Anyway, whether he bred them or not, he must have thought a lot of them. The fact that he built them stables like those at Wanderby shows that; and so does Sulieman's grave. I can't find out yet why this horse called Sulieman should merit a special grave; but I'll follow that up. It might be interesting."

"Interesting," said Susan. "It certainly will be if it helps us to find out whether Ash Court really is, as you think, connected with Wanderby. Perhaps Mr. Durham lived there? There might have been a house there as well as the stables then."

Mr. Cameron nodded and lit his pipe.

"There might have been," he agreed, "though I haven't found any evidence that there was. Certainly Durham couldn't have lived at what is now the farm where the Drakes live. That's quite new—relatively speaking, anyway—built, I should say, in the good old Victorian days."

He got up to help Susan and Mrs. Cameron collect the tea things on to a copper tray that Mrs. Cameron had made.

"Shines like gold in the firelight, doesn't it?" he said. "Like the Wanderby chalice would, if we had it here."

Susan smiled.

"If we only had it," she said. "I do hope, Daddy, you'll go on finding out whatever you can about that. Peter's frightfully keen to try to find it when he comes."

Mr. Cameron laughed.

"Of course I shall go on trying," he said.

He had, as a matter of fact, little time for the next three months to do any more work on the history of Wanderby and the chalice that had been lost. He had too many lectures to give at the University in Manchester, and from Whitsuntide onwards examinations took up all his time. By the time that Peter and Ann came he hadn't discovered anything more.

Ann trekked over on Pepper from Leintwardine, as she had said she might. She was thrilled by the paddock and stables, and it was arranged that Pepper, after his long journey, should have the stall next to the saddle-room for the night. Peter was very lucky indeed, because his father, consulting Major Wingate about the journey to Selbury, found that there was, as he had hoped, a horse-box going up empty to Chester from one of the Newmarket studs, at which it had been delivering a horse, so that Blaze was able to travel in that, and Peter had a wonderful journey, talking to the driver all the way. He told Susan and Ann about it when, as soon as he arrived at half-past three, they all helped to give Blaze a feed and a drink and then let him out in the paddock, where Dusky and Evan Bach were.

Pepper had been taken to the blacksmith in Selbury and hadn't come home yet.

"I had to get up jolly early," Peter said. "Half-past five, I think it was, but that didn't matter a bit. We came through the Cottesmore and Quorn country. The driver told me all about the hunting there. Grand country for riding that ! And at Melton we stopped and bought a Melton Mowbray pie. Scrumptious, I'll tell you ! I could eat one every day."

Ann laughed at the relish in his eager words.

"Don't I remember them," she agreed. "I hacked through that country when I went to Manordown last year, and I had one myself then. It's wonderful country. I'd like to get a job down there and try some runs with the Quorn. Just look at Blaze and Dusky," she added. "I do believe they're having a gossip about the gymkhana at Manordown last year."

They all looked down the paddock, where Dusky and Blaze were standing nose to nose and frisking their tails.

"And Evan Bach's the odd man out, it seems," laughed Ann; for Evan Bach was grazing quietly away from the other two. "Well, there's plenty of feed for them all here; and Pepper, too, when he comes back with his new shoes."

"Plenty of room in the stables, too," agreed Peter. "They're just as good as mine, But I say, Susan, what about that chalice you wrote to me about? Has your father found out any more?"

"Nothing yet," Susan answered. "Father's been too busy with exams. But he says he's going to do some more work on it now. The main thing, at the moment, is

getting things ready for the camp. It'll be an awful job in the morning getting all the stuff into Father's car. The tents are there already, of course. We've only got to put them up. Four bell tents and a small marquee...."

"Four bell tents?" Peter exclaimed. "What a crowd of us there'll be!"

The next day was sunny and warm and they'd hardly finished breakfast when Jacqueline and Jimmy arrived and were introduced to Peter and Ann. Then Keith turned up and he was introduced too. By nine o'clock they were all helping Mr. Cameron load his car with suitcases, blankets, mattress-cases to be filled with straw at the farm and assorted packages of crockery, food, cutlery, axes, string, rope, kettles, pots and pans, and, in Peter's opinion, a lot of other things they wouldn't need.

"Gosh!" he laughed as Mr. Cameron somehow squeezed himself into the driver's seat and drove away. "Did you ever see such a load as that! It reminds me of old Bradley at home, who goes round the villages selling saucepans and frying-pans and brushes and paraffin and all that sort of thing. Draped all over the outside of his sort of motor-van, they are, and they dangle and jingle so much as he crawls about those little, bumpy lanes that you can hear him a mile away. Oh, cheerio! Are you off?" he broke off to say to Jimmy and Keith, who were going up to camp in the canoes. "See you at camp. But you'll get there before us, I expect."

"No they won't!" cut in Sūsan. "If we go over the fields, we can get there long before they show up. Anyway, we're not racing you, Jimmy. Mother wants a

hand with the beds and things here before we start."

Ann and Jacqueline helped with making the beds and the washing up of the breakfast things. Then Mrs. Cameron packed them all off.

"Father's got everything for lunch in camp," she said. "I'll get there as soon as I can, probably some time during the afternoon."

They rode slowly across the fields, because Ann wanted to know all about the countryside; and when they reached the camp they found that Mr. Cameron had driven his loaded car down the field to the river bank where the camp was going to be. The tents had been dumped on the river bank by Mr. Drake of Wanderby Farm.

"I thought you were never coming," said Mr. Cameron. "But now you're here, turn out those ponies in the field and give me a hand with all these tents and things."

It was hard work in the hot sun, and everyone paused for a rest when Keith and Jimmy arrived in the canoes at eleven o'clock.

"By Jingo!" cried Jimmy, beaching his canoe on the sandy beach in front of the camp. "You've jolly well been working to get that marquee pitched and one of the bell tents as well."

"Oh, we're experts!" Susan laughed: and Jacqueline told them to come along quick and give a hand with the other tents. By twelve o'clock they were all pitched.

"Some camp!" remarked Jimmy, surveying the four bell tents and the marquee. "Father will be pleased with

this. But I say ! I'm hungry. When are we going to have lunch?"

Mr. Cameron laughed.

"As soon as you like," he said. "But it's only a picnic lunch today. Tonight, when the camp's all set, we can have a fire and cook."

"Whoopee!" exclaimed Susan. "Bags I light the fire!"

"No, I bags that," protested Peter. "You can cook if you like."

"When you've got in some wood," put in Jacqueline. "Jimmy and Keith can go off after lunch in the canoes and get a load of it."

They all gave a hand with putting up a folding table in the shade of a willow tree that grew on the river bank just above the camp.

"Jolly handy!" said Ann as they all sat down to the sandwiches and cold sausages and lemonade and fruit that Mrs. Cameron had packed. "And what a lovely pool there is at this bend in the river here."

Jacqueline explained that that was where they usually bathed.

"No old tree stumps in it," Jimmy explained. "You have to watch out for those in this river, you know. I'll tell you where the worst ones are, and then you won't do what Keith once did—dive in and come a cropper on one of them."

Ann looked at Keith, who, with a sandwich in one hand and a sausage in the other, was gazing abstractedly at the quiet waters of the pool.

"Did it knock you out?" she asked.

Keith shook his head and smiled.

"Bit of a cut, that's all," he replied, and Ann reflected that she'd never met a boy who had so little to say.

The picnic over, they planned the afternoon's work.

"Somebody will have to go to the farm to get some milk for tea," said Mr. Cameron. "Jacqueline and Peter, suppose you two do that. And collect some potatoes if you can. Oh, and butter too. Jimmy and Keith, you two had better go off for wood—bring enough for a fire to make tea and as much more as you can get into the canoes. While you're away we can tidy up, Susan and Ann and I."

They were all getting up from the table when Ann said: "Water, Mr. Cameron? What do we do about that?"

She had to laugh herself when Jimmy laughed and said: "Water! When there's gallons of it running past our door in the river here? I know it looks pretty muddy," he added when they all looked down at the pool, "but it's only the sand that makes it thick, and Father says it's all right if we boil it first."

"Of course it is," confirmed Jacqueline. "We've drunk gallons of it in our time."

"And you're still here," laughed Ann. "It's handy for the ponies too. It's jolly nice that we can graze them in this lovely field."

That afternoon—their first afternoon in camp—seemed to pass like a flash. Before they knew where they were, it was time for tea. When Jimmy and Keith came back with the wood, they found that Ann and Mr. Cameron had found enough wood to make a fire, Susan had filled the kettle and was looking after it, and

Ann and Jacqueline had laid the table and cut the bread and butter and put out the honey and jam.

"That looks," said Jimmy as he passed the table with an armful of wood, "like one of Mummy's cakes."

"It is," said Jacqueline. "Stack that wood over there well away from the fire."

They had brought enough to see them through that first day, and Jimmy said they had found an alder tree that had been blown down the winter before.

"If we take the axes," he said, "we can get enough to last us ages, I should think."

"Enough for camp-fires at night?" asked Susan. "It must be lovely sitting round the fire in the dark."

But when the evening came they found themselves yawning after their day in the open air.

"Tell-tale yawns," laughed Mrs. Cameron, who had come down on her bicycle after tea. "And I don't wonder after all the work you've done: and seeing to the ponies as well. If I were you all, I should tumble into bed, and we'll have a camp-fire tomorrow night."

She knew, though she didn't tell the children so, that they probably wouldn't, during their first night in camp, sleep so soundly as they did at home.

"They'll lie awake listening to all the strange noises," she told her husband as they went to bed in their tent. "Owls and things and the swish of the river going by—you know the sort of thing."

"If they're half as tired as I am," Mr. Cameron yawned, "they won't hear anything."

And he didn't. He fell asleep at once: and so did Mrs. Cameron and Jimmy and Keith and Jacqueline. But Susan and Peter, in their separate tents, did exactly

as Mrs. Cameron had said. They lay awake listening to the swish of the river and the owls and all sorts of strange little rustlings and whisperings that they couldn't understand.

At long last Peter fell asleep; but Susan, round about midnight, when all seemed very still, was conscious of a new sort of noise, a strange, intermittent noise that seemed now, in the midnight quiet, to be the only noise that she could hear. At first she thought it might be the breathing of Jacqueline or Ann, but she soon decided that it couldn't be that. It came from outside. Then she thought it might be coming from some strange kind of animal in the field; and her next thought—a more alarming one—was that it sounded a bit like a man coming swishing through the grass. Startled by this, she thought of waking Ann and Jacqueline; but she felt ashamed to do that. Then she realized that her mattress, which was on the ground, was next to the skirting of the tent, and that she could, by turning on her side and reaching out, lift up the skirting sufficiently to see outside. Her pulses were beating quicker as she turned on her side. What would she do if it was a man—somebody creeping down, perhaps, to rob them in the night? Cautiously she raised the skirting of the tent. It was bright moonlight outside. Not a soul could be seen. But the noise went on—a curious swishing noise, almost a crunch. . . . Then she suddenly realized what it was. Evan Bach and Dusky were cropping the grass near the hedge that ran from the river to the farm. That was the noise! Just ponies enjoying a feed! She nearly laughed, but stopped herself just in time. With a sigh, she turned

over and went to sleep. It wasn't till two in the morning that she woke suddenly again.

"Whee! What on earth is happening?" Jacqueline was saying as Susan started up in bed. The whole tent was swaying, and outside it seemed as if a herd of elephants were stamping around. Ann, calm as usual, merely got out of her bed. Just as she did so, the tent collapsed.

"Look out! The pole!" exclaimed Ann, and was just in time to catch it and stop it falling on Jacqueline. She held it as long as she could, but she had to lower it slowly to the ground. This, of course, brought the tent itself down on to her back. But however hard they tried neither she nor Jacqueline could find the opening of the door.

"Help!" laughed Jacqueline. "Murderers! Thieves! They're trying to smother us!"

But Susan, who had wriggled out under the skirting of the tent, couldn't do anything but laugh as she watched the heaving, wriggling outlines of Ann and Jacqueline entangled in the tent.

"It's the ponies," she managed to say at last. "Dusky and Evan Bach! They got their hooves in the guy ropes and they've pulled all the tent-pegs out."

She was answered only by groans and grunts.

"Well, don't stand gawping and laughing there!" said the muffled voice of Jacqueline. "Help us, can't you, to get out. . . ."

And just at that moment her head found the door of the tent.

"You blithering idiots!" she began; and saw that she was speaking, not to Susan, but to Mr. and Mrs.

Cameron, who, awakened by the noise, had come running from their tent.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said Jacqueline; and just then Ann's head also popped out of the tent. They were grinning there in the moonlight at Mr. and Mrs. Cameron when Jimmy and Keith and Peter all tumbled out of their tent to see what was happening.

"Crikey!" laughed Jimmy. "What a mess! I don't admire your tent-pitching, you girls."

But he and Keith and Peter all came to give a hand and, with everyone helping, they soon had the bell tent up again.

"Glad it wasn't our tent," Keith remarked as he and Peter and Jimmy got back into their sleeping-bags. But Jimmy chuckled to himself.

"It's given me an idea," he said. "We'll get up quietly one night when they've forgotten this, and then we'll drop the tent on them suddenly, just for a lark."

Chapter Seven

GHOSTS OF THE SCOTTIES OF

THE following day, which was Saturday, was a busy one. There were many things to be done.

"You never stop working in camp," said Mrs. Cameron as they had breakfast under the willow tree. "It's good preparation for running a house. Did you all enjoy your morning bathe in the pool?"

"Scrumptious!" said Susan, spreading her bread and butter with marmalade. "It makes you hungry, a bathe does. I vote we have another before lunch."

"Before lunch!" laughed Ann. "We haven't finished breakfast yet."

"And we don't need another bathe just to make us hungry," Jimmy put in. "Hand over that marmalade, Jacqueline. I suppose Keith and I'll have to go getting wood when we've finished this."

Jacqueline handed over the marmalade jar.

"Not till you've helped with the washing-up," she said. "When I come to think of it," she added with a wink at Ann, "you and Keith might do it while we others ride into Selbury to do the shopping Mother wants us to do."

"Oh, yeah!" mocked Jimmy. "Tell that to the Marines."

But he and Keith gave a hand with the washing-up when all their appetites were finally satisfied.

"You'll have to bring more bread than I put on your

shopping list," Mrs. Cameron said. "I've evidently misjudged your appetites. And more butter, too, I think. But call, will you, when you are in the town, and ask Mrs. Clement if she and the doctor are likely to come for the week-end."

"We jolly well will," replied Jacqueline. "But I was just wondering how we shall carry all this stuff." She was reading the shopping list. "On the ponies, I mean. I don't see how we can ride with armfuls of groceries."

Ann and Susan both laughed and Peter, who was tying a bootlace, looked up with a grin.

"Easy," he said. "I brought my pannier bags, and Susan's got some, too."

Ann explained that hers also were in her bedroom at Ash Court.

"Then that's all right," said Jacqueline. "I vote we ride to Ash Court first and leave the ponies there. Then we'll do the shopping and call on the Clements, and then I'll bring you another way back here—just for the ride."

"Spiffing," said Susan. "And if we're back in time, we'll have another bathe."

They set off in the sunshine, Jacqueline taking them round by the Abbey, so that Ann and Peter could see the ruins and the stables there.

"One of these days, when it's clear, we'll go up the cupola," Jacqueline said, "and have a look at our noble countryside. But not till we've settled down in camp. We could ride over to Rushmere, too, when we're feeling like a goodish long ride. There's another sort of abbey there—not a ruin like this, but a house in which old Sir Peter Brocklebank lives. He's an absolute dear—

nearly eighty, I should think, but he still goes ambling about his park on a skewbald mare that looks as ancient as himself. Father's his doctor, and he's been very decent to me. Nothing pleases him more than to show you what he calls his Museum of Cheshire Antiquities. Quite a good show in its way, I suppose."

They were mounting the slope of Fir Tree Nob as she spoke.

"Anyway," added Jacqueline, "the park at Rushmere's wizard—woods all round the place, and a mere, and simply wonderful canters down those rides between the trees."

They all decided that Rushmere, even at the cost of looking at Cheshire antiquities, was a place they mustn't miss.

"I'll ask Father about it this morning," Jacqueline said; "if we can get hold of him, I mean. He'll have gone off on his rounds by now, I expect."

Dr. Clement, they found, when they called at Hawthorn Cottage later on, had been called out to see the wife of a farmer ten miles away.

"I don't expect him back to lunch," said Mrs. Clement, "but I'll ask him to ring up Sir Peter when he has time. We're both hoping to come and see you in camp tomorrow, by the way."

"Oh, that would be lovely," Susan said. "Then Dr. Clement can teach us all about the canoes."

"And the coracle," Peter put in. "I've never seen a boat like that, though Ann says she saw some—where was it, Ann?"

Ann explained that she'd seen men fishing in coracles on the River Severn near Shrewsbury.

"But I only had a glimpse as we crossed a bridge. They seemed to be fishing with one hand and paddling the coracle with the other—pretty difficult, I should think. And I don't know how they stop themselves upsetting in cockle-shells like those."

"Clothes baskets, I should call them," Jacqueline replied. "But come on, all you people. We've got to get back to camp in time for lunch."

They rode back by a different and longer route, taking the Stapley Road till they came to a lane on their right which led them round the western side of Fir Tree Nob. At the entrance to the lane there was an ancient barn over which an oak tree spread its leafy arms.

"This is what they call Prince's Lane," said Jacqueline as she led the way into the lane. "Lordly name, isn't it, for a lane that's only nowadays used by farmers' carts? Father says it's called Prince's Lane because Prince Charlie did something or other round about here. I don't think anybody knows exactly what."

"Tophole, isn't it?" Susan added, turning to Peter, who was third in the single file. "We may be riding over the very ground Prince Charlie rode along."

"If they had any horses with them," interposed Ann, who was following Peter. "I always understood they were a raggle-taggle of wild and ragged Highlanders; but the Prince, I suppose, had a horse."

"You bet he had," said Peter; "and a wizard one, I expect. Yo-ho for the Scotties! I say! There wouldn't have been a battle here, I suppose?"

He looked round eagerly at the fields on both sides.

"Or a massacre or something," he added. "You know what I mean. The local people all for King George and

the wild Highlanders stealing their cattle and stuff. Then some farmer would lose his hair and he'd get killed and then all his pals would join in. . . ."

"King George for England! Down with the Scots!" laughed Susan, rising in her stirrups with one arm aloft.

"Yes; and out claymores!" Peter responded. "Bonnie Prince Charlie for ever! Swish! Swosh!"

And he leaned from his saddle and made, with a phantom claymore, a swipe at a thorn-bush at the side of the lane.

"There might be bones all over these fields," he continued as Jacqueline, finding the going better, broke into a trot. "Highlanders' bones and British bones; and ghosts as well, if we come round here late one night. You ought to ask your father, Susan, to find out whether there really was a battle here."

"I will," replied Susan; "though he's doing it already, I believe. Do you think there might be really ghosts? I'd love to see a ghost in kilts."

"Bones all rattling," Peter laughed, "and groaning about the cold of the braw, bricht, monlicht nicht!"

But a further consideration of ghosts was nipped in the bud, because Jacqueline, turning in her saddle, pointed ahead to a covert beside the lane.

"That's Prince's Covert," she said, "Where they usually find a fox when they hunt round here. If we leave the lane there, we can cut across Mr. Wilson's fields. He's awfully decent; he told me I could ride his land as much as I like. There are two or three hedges, too, that we can jump."

"Whizzo!" exclaimed Peter. "Let's get a move on, then!"

The going was better in the old lane now, so they broke into a trot and soon reached the covert Jacqueline had pointed out. A gate there let them into an eight-acre field that was so flat and green and inviting that they all broke into a canter at once, and the ponies, urged to stretch their limbs, soon carried them on in what might have been a race if Jacqueline hadn't shouted that she was going to jump the low hedge that bounded the field on its farther side.

Ann saw that the jump was an easy one.

"Come on, Susan," she shouted. "It's easier, this, than jumping that hedge on the way from Wallace's farm."

Susan laughed back and set Dusky at the fence. They all sailed over and followed Jacqueline across the next field. In the middle of this there was a brook.

"Take it there!" shouted Jacqueline. "Just to the right of that tree: the ground's firmer there."

And, collecting Evan Bach, she let him go about twenty paces from the brook. They all followed, Pepper first and then Blaze and Dusky clearing the brook together easily.

"Well done!" shouted Ann to Susan as they drew rein on the other side. "I say, Susan! You've jolly well improved since Manordown."

Susan flushed.

"Well, I've had more practice," she said. "I've been wondering, though, how soon I shall be a bit too big for Dusky. . . ."

She patted Dusky's neck.

"Dear old Dusky," she murmured. "I couldn't bear to part with you."

"Of course not!" Ann replied. "You can ride him for ages yet."

But, as they rode back to the camp, she wondered whether poor Susan wasn't right. She'd grown such a lot since Manordown; and was leggier, too.

"When I come to think of it," thought Ann as they came in sight of Wanderby, "she'll soon be needing—well, not quite a Pepper yet, but it won't be long before she does; and Peter, too; he's shooting up and widening out."

She wondered how Susan and Peter would take it—that dreadful, inevitable day when they'd realize that they'd grown too big and heavy for Dusky and Blaze.

"Oh, well," she sighed as they entered the Wanderby wood. "It comes to all of us, I suppose. Thank Heaven, Pepper, I'm never likely now to grow too big for you."

Chapter Eight

FIRST DIGGINGS AT WANDERBY

THEY were able to canter through the woods, because Jacqueline took them by a grassy ride, at the end of which they could see the Abbey ruins and the blue sky beyond.

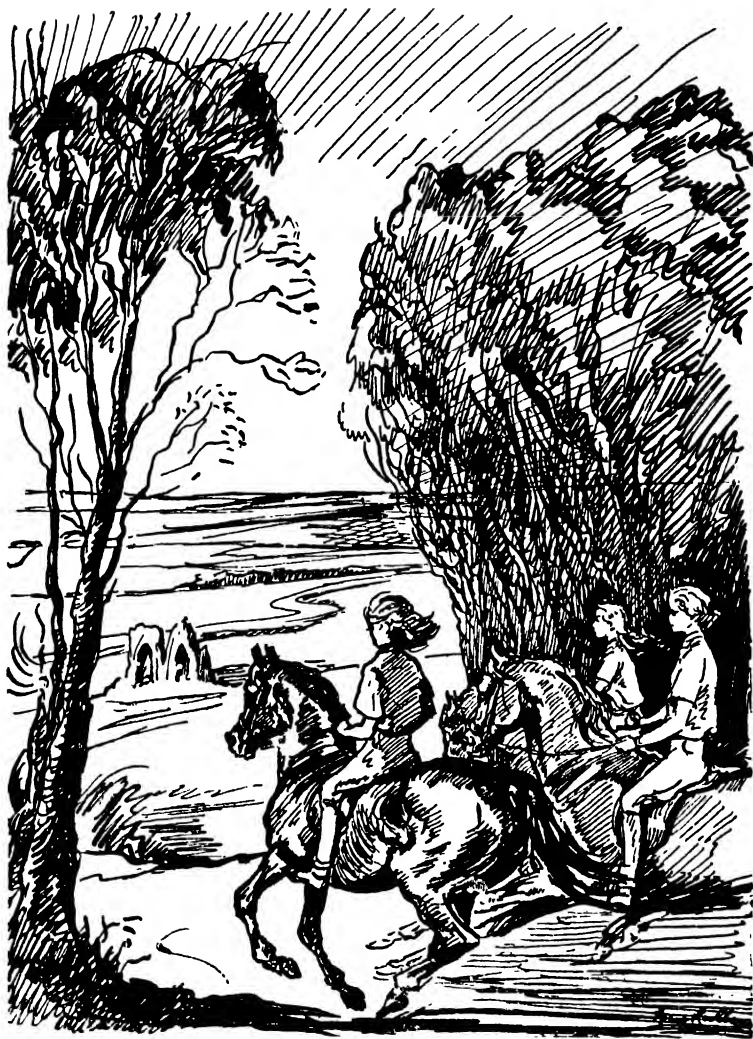
"Good Heavens!" cried Jacqueline as they came out of the trees. "There's Mr. Cameron and Keith. And, look! They're digging already; they never let on that they were going to start today."

They all drew rein and stared at Mr. Cameron and Keith. Mr. Cameron, dressed in white shorts and strong boots and an open-necked blue shirt, was standing with one hand on the handle of a spade, while with the other he was wiping the sweat from his brow. A yard away Keith was digging furiously. His small figure, clad in nothing but a pair of brown shorts that seemed too big for him, with big boots to match, seemed absurdly tiny for the big spade he was wielding.

"Like a Hunt terrier after a fox!" laughed Ann as they all moved on to see what was happening. She couldn't believe that Keith had it in him to dig like that. Mr. Cameron grinned as they rode up.

"Hot work!" he said. "You're just in time to see us knocking off, if only I can stop Keith digging. He's like a mechanical grab!"

Keith looked up with a grin and drew a hand across



They could see the Abbey ruins.

his mouth. But he didn't speak. He ran his eye instead along the line of stakes that Mr. Cameron had planted in the ground on the Abbey's southern side.

"We're hoping to find some traces of the cloisters," Mr. Cameron explained. "And we might, with luck, find the plan of the whole Abbey in time; but that's enough for this morning, Keith. Let's all get down to the camp and have a spot of lunch."

At the camp they found that Mrs. Cameron was laying the table under the willow tree. On the river bank Jimmy was cutting up the pile of wood that he and Keith had collected in the canoes.

They all washed and sat down to lunch beneath the willow tree.

"You can thank Jimmy and Keith for these chops," said Mrs. Cameron. "If they hadn't got me some wood, I couldn't have cooked you a hot lunch."

"How did the digging go, Mr. Cameron?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, quite well," Mr. Cameron replied. "Though we'll have to get some help later on, I think. Perhaps Mr. Drake at the farm will let us have one or two of his men to give a hand. Can't put it all on you," he added with a smile at Keith. "By the way, that book you asked me about is in our tent."

"What book?" enquired Jimmy. "Keith isn't going to swot, I hope?"

Mr. Cameron laughed.

"Oh, Keith's got interested in archæology," he said. "It's only a book about Cheshire antiquities."

Susan looked up with interest.

"Like that Museum that Jacqueline told us about?"

she asked, "the one at . . . Where was it, Jacqueline, that other abbey you said we might ride over to?"

"Rushmere," said Jacqueline.

Mr. Cameron was helping his wife to serve out apricots from a tin.

"Yes; I've heard about it," he said. "At Sir Peter Brocklebank's place, you mean? I haven't been there yet, but I'd very much like to go. He's got some exciting things there, I believe."

He handed Ann her apricots.

"I saw a sort of catalogue of it in the Chester Library," he went on. "I shouldn't wonder, Susan, if it mightn't help us to clear up our little problem about Ash Court. You know what I mean? Who lived there long ago and whether it's somehow connected with Wanderby, as I think it is. You've told the others, Susan, about all that?"

"And about the chalice, too," Susan replied. "Will the Rushmere Museum help us at all about that?"

Mr. Cameron put down his spoon and frowned.

"I can't say till I've seen the Museum," he said. "It's mostly full of Roman remains, but there might be some relics of Wanderby. One never knows."

He paused and felt for his pipe.

"We could go and see it and find out, if you like," he said. "You girls could ride over. . . ."

"Oh, yes!" agreed Susan. "Jacqueline's told us already it's a lovely place. Rides through the woods and a mere as well. . . ."

"I'll ask Father tomorrow," said Jacqueline, "if he comes down to camp."

They cleared the table and washed-up, and then

Jimmy asked Susan and Peter and Ann if they'd like to go up the river in the canoes.

"The trouble is," he explained, "that we can't take all three of you—not all together, I mean. I could take Susan and Keith could take Peter or Ann. . . ."

But Ann quickly solved the difficulty.

"I've promised Jacqueline," she said, "to ride in with her to the saddler's in the town to get a new girth; so you go, Peter. I can have a shot some other time."

She was rather amused to see the relief on Jimmy's face.

"He's rather fallen for Susan," she thought as she watched Jimmy set off with Susan in the big Rob Roy canoe.

"Of course," Jimmy was explaining as he paddled across the pool beneath the willow tree, "you can't learn properly how to manage a canoe when you're sitting in front of me like this! You can't see what I'm doing, but at any rate, until you can use a paddle, you can't get on much. But this way you'll get the feel of a canoe. It's like a bike. You get so that it's part of your body, and when it tilts one way you tilt the other and balance it. I'll show you how to use a paddle when we get a bit further on. Look! Sit tight while I heel her over. Don't you move! I'll do the balancing."

He rocked the canoe and Susan, for a moment, thought they were going to upset; but she soon learnt that, as Jimmy had said, she automatically leaned to the right when the canoe tilted to the left, and to the left when it tilted to the right.

"Oo! It's jolly nice!" she exclaimed as Jimmy brought the canoe on to a steady keel again. She was

thrilled. When they came to an open reach where the river ran straight for half a mile, Jimmy selected a place where the grassy bank was level and low and told Susan they could change places, so that she could paddle a bit.

She took the seat that Jimmy had had.

"I'll sit facing you now," said Jimmy, "and keep an eye on you. Now, back-water with your left, just to swing the bows out away from the bank."

Susan plunged her left-hand paddle in and pushed it forward as Jimmy told her to do. The bows swung out and making a stroke with her right-hand paddle she brought it out into midstream.

"Now right and left alternately," Jimmy directed, "and watch out where you're going—left to go right and right to go left—that's right—you've got it—no, look out for the bank—paddle hard with your left—no! back-water quick! with your right—— Oh, dash! Too late!"

They hit the grassy bank with a bump.

"It doesn't matter," Jimmy laughed. "Come on. Have another go."

They swung out into the river again.

"Now—left—right—left—right—an eye on where you're going—good——"

His directions rang out on the afternoon air. At the end of the reach Susan dropped the paddle on to the gunwales with a pleased sigh.

"It's not so difficult as I thought," she said. "But I've got a lot to learn yet. What's happened to Peter and Keith?"

"Oh, they'll be all right," replied Jimmy. "Both of them can swim. Would you like to have a go alone?"

You'd manage it all right," he added, seeing the doubt on Susan's face. For half an hour she paddled up and down the reach, with Jimmy directing her from the bank.

"You're getting on fine, I must say," he finally commended her. "A bit more practice and you'll be all right. Suppose you paddle me back to tea? I'll sit facing the bows and tell you where the snags and tree-stumps are."

Susan paddled him safely back to the camp. Round the fire they saw Peter and Keith, who had been, as Jimmy had guessed, downstream instead of up.

"Peter got on fine," said Keith. "And your father and mother are here, Jimmy. They've just gone into their tent. We're going to have a special camp-fire for them tonight."

Chapter Nine

CANOEES

THE camp-fire kept them up rather late that night, and nobody awoke in either Susan's or Peter's tent till nearly nine o'clock. Susan was the first to wake up, and the first thing she heard was the sound of somebody splashing in the swimming pool. Jumping up, she saw that the doctor and Mr. Cameron were already having a bathe.

"Come on, Ann! Come on, Jacqueline!" she said. "Hurry, or you'll miss the fun!"

She ran out into the sunshine and banged on the side of Peter's tent.

"Come on and have a bathe!" she shouted, and ran down to the swimming pool. In a moment she was swimming with the doctor and Mr. Cameron.

"I say!" said the doctor. "You're just like a fish. I'm glad to know that if you're learning to paddle a canoe."

"Oh, yes, I can swim," laughed Susan. "Jimmy says you wouldn't let him use a canoe until he could swim."

"No; that's true," said the doctor. "Have you ever fallen out of a boat? Bit of a shock, you know, the first time it happens. Oh, here are Ann and Jacqueline. Ann, I hope you've woken up those two lazy boys?"

Ann laughed and dived in.

"They're coming, I think," she spluttered as she

came up. "What was that you were saying about falling out of boats?"

"Oh, only that it's a bit of a shock the first time," the doctor replied. "It's important to get used to it. I was once at the seaside and a man fell out of a dinghy and was drowned simply because he lost his head when he fell in."

He swam to the bank and clambered out. "I know what we'd better do," he said, "we'll take you and Susan and Peter out in bathing costumes later on today; and we'll show you how to get into a canoe when you've fallen out of it—how to get in from the water, I mean. It's a trick you ought to know. Hello, you boys!" he added as Jimmy and Peter and Keith came running to the pool. "Got out of bed at last, I see. Well, don't stay in too long. Ann will tell you what I've planned for later on."

It was hot when they finally set off in the canoes. Jimmy took Susan and Peter in one canoe and the doctor took Ann in the other, Jacqueline staying to help Mrs. Clement and Mrs. Cameron to cook the hot lunch they had planned to have. Keith had chosen to go for a walk down the river bank by himself.

"Funny fellow, Keith," said Jimmy as they paddled upstream beyond the swimming pool. "He has these fits of wanting to be alone. He scribbles away in that diary of his. You know. Writes poetry, too—awful stuff. But when he's normal you couldn't have a better pal."

They arrived, after ten minutes' paddling, at a straight reach in the river where the water was deep enough.

"Not that the depth matters much," said the doctor,

“except that it’s got to be deep enough to make you swim. The important thing is to know how to upset without getting your canoe so full of water that you can’t get into it and, when you’ve learnt that, how to get back into it from the water when you’ve fallen out. Now you get out on the bank, Ann, and you two others do the same, and Jimmy and I will show you how it’s done.”

Ann and Peter and Susan all disembarked, and the doctor and Jimmy paddled down to the end of the reach.

“Now watch me,” the doctor called out. “I’m going to rock the canoe like this, and watch how, when I upset, I don’t wait till the whole canoe rolls over and ships so much water that it’s waterlogged. No; I shall kick myself out of it before the water starts pouring into the well. It’s nothing but a little trick. You watch! Now here goes!”

He leaned to the left till the gunwale of the canoe on that side was nearly under the sandy stream: then, kicking with his legs, he shot himself over the side with a splash, and Susan saw the canoe shoot away from him, rocking a little on its keel. It had taken only a little water over its side.

“Not so difficult, is it?” the doctor laughed as he wiped the water out of his moustache. “Now for getting in again. Watch this carefully.”

He swam to the canoe and laid both hands upon its stern.

“Never try to get in over its side,” he said. “You’ll never be able to do that. No; swim behind the stern like this, grip it with both hands, lean on it and let your

weight press it down—as far as you can—like this; then kick with your legs in the water—so! You see what I did? I'm right astride the stern now, and balancing the canoe with one hand on each side of it and now—I'll just wriggle forwards like this—until I'm just astride the well. Now, hands behind me—one on each gunwale. I balance the canoe and then—watch!—in with my legs like this and here I am, sitting in the cockpit again. Easy, isn't it? Now let Jimmy show you all over again."

Jimmy came paddling up with a grin and a wink at the girls.

"Rock and roll!" he shouted, leaning rapidly from side to side till the canoe sent waves washing into either bank. "Rock and roll—and . . . over she goes!" With a kick, he was out of the canoe and swimming after it. He got back into it just as his father had done.

"Quicker than I am, isn't he?" the doctor laughed. "Now you girls take the canoes and have a try. Jimmy and I will stay in the water to give you a hand if you need it, though I don't think you will."

Susan was the first to have a go, and she found that, try as she would, she couldn't upset herself out of the canoe.

"Go on!" cried Jimmy. "Chuck yourself out of it! You needn't be frightened of anything."

"I'm not frightened!" Susan laughed. "It's just that I can't fall out."

The doctor knew what her trouble was.

"It's just like trying to fall off a bicycle on purpose," he said. "It's hard to do, I know. But look! Jimmy and I will tip you out, and then at least you'll know what it feels like to upset."

They swam to the canoe, and the next minute Susan was in the water with a tremendous splash.

"Ouch!" she shouted as they all laughed.

"Now!" said Jimmy, swimming by her side. "Now get in again, if you can," and, to his astonishment, Susan managed this easily.

"Gosh! Like an eel," he commended admiringly as Susan wriggled along the canoe. "Now, Ann, it's your turn. See if you can tip yourself out."

Ann, like Susan found it hard to fall out, but she managed it at last.

They spent another half-hour practising. By that time the sun was high in the blue of a cloudless sky and the doctor decided they'd better get back to the camp.

"A good morning's work," he said as they started back. "I feel now that all of you will be much safer if you go out in the canoes alone."

"And the coracle," Susan said. "We haven't—any of us—had a go in that yet."

The doctor laughed. "The coracle," he said. "You'll find that a bit more difficult, I expect."

"About as easy," said Jimmy, "as going about in a porridge bowl; but you soon learn the trick of it."

They followed the doctor's canoe, which was just about to cross the swimming pool.

"Shall I upset us here?" Jimmy suggested to Susan, "just to show Mother and Mrs. Cameron how you two have learned how to get into a canoe again."

"You dare!" challenged Susan.

But Jimmy only laughed.

"It's too near lunch, or else I would," he said. "Just look at that fire that Keith's made. There's something pretty tasty cooking in those pots, I'll bet."

Chapter Ten

THOROUGHBREDS AT WANDERBY

FOR lunch they had Mrs. Clement's special brand of Irish stew, with a fruit salad to follow and two kinds of Cheshire cheese from Mr. Drake's farm.

The doctor cut off a hunk of the Old Blue and began to relish it.

"You were asking me," he said to Mr. Cameron, "whether you and the children could go and see Rushmere Abbey and the Museum there. I'm sure you could. I'll ring up Sir Peter tomorrow. It'll be too late tonight when we get home."

"Tonight?" exclaimed Ann. "Are you leaving us tonight?"

The doctor ate his last piece of cheese and smiled rather sadly.

"I'm afraid we must," he said "I've a lot to do tomorrow and I've no excuse—no professional excuse, I mean—for visiting Sir Peter now. He's just as fit, at the moment, as any old fox of over eighty could be. Well, what do you say? Shall I ring him up in the morning and suggest that you go, say, on Tuesday? Would that do?"

"It would suit me very well," agreed Mr. Cameron. "It would give me time to run back home and look up one or two things that I'd like to ask Sir Peter about."

"Very well," said the doctor, beginning to fill his pipe. "Then, that's all fixed. And how do you all propose to go? In Mr. Cameron's car, I suppose. . . ."

But Jacqueline objected at once to that.

"Oh, no!" she said "Susan and Peter and Ann and I all want to ride. It's only six or eight miles to Rushmere, isn't it?"

"Yes; about that," the doctor agreed. "And Sir Peter's always glad to see anybody on a horse. It reminds him of his hunting days, and Jimmy, I know, will be glad to see the mere again."

"If he'd only let me take my canoe there," Jimmy said. "It's a gorgeous piece of water, that, with woods all round it and reeds lining all the banks."

His disappointment made Jacqueline laugh. "Poor Jimmy!" she said. "He's dying to lark about the mere in his canoe. But he's right about the woods, of course. It must be lovely to canter down those rides between the trees."

"What I want to see," put in Keith, "is the library there. I'm wondering if it's like the one at Arley Hall. Mr. Warburton's, you know," he added to Mr. Cameron. "You'll know all about him and the rhyming signposts he made for the crossroads on his estates."

"Rhyming signposts?" Susan asked. "What? Not on the roads, to tell you where to go?"

"Oh, yes they were," explained Keith. "They were wooden ones, so I read in a book, and the names of the villages to which the roads went were all in rhymes. Lord de Tabley wrote a lot of poetry, you know. But I've never seen a real rhyming signpost, of course."

"I've seen them," the doctor said. "I remember

seeing one or two when I was a medical student at Manchester. I used to cycle a lot at week-ends then—watching the village cricket matches on Saturdays, you know. Knutsford and Arley and all those places were on my beat. But you, Cameron, will have much more exciting things than rhyming signposts to ask Sir Peter about.”

Mr. Cameron, who was rolling a cigarette, smiled quietly to himself.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he replied with a shrug. “I want to see what he’s got in his Museum, of course; and, as you know, I’m keen to find out if Sir Peter knows who lived at Ash Court—in the olden days, I mean—and whether he thinks it had any connection with Wanderby, as I suspect it had. And then, of course, there’s the history of Wanderby Abbey itself.”

“And the golden chalice,” Jacqueline said.

She was rather annoyed when the doctor laughed.

“It seems to me, Cameron,” he said, “that you’ve got quite a lot to ask Sir Peter about. That’ll please him all the more, of course. But are you quite sure that this chalice you talk about exists? One would have thought that, in a country place like this, where so many tales and legends are bandied about, there’d be some tittle-tattle or other about a thing like a chalice, a gold one, too, especially if it was such an Abbey treasure as you make out. But I’ve not heard of it myself; and there’s precious little, I assure you, that doesn’t, in one way or another, come my way as I go about the countryside. But you’ve really got some evidence, I understand?”

Mr. Cameron flicked off his cigarette ash.

“Well, not a lot, I must admit,” he said. “But the bit I’ve got is enough for me—enough, anyway, to make

me want to follow it up. You never know what the smallest hints may lead to, if you persevere."

"Of course not," the doctor agreed. "There speaks the scientist. And I'd like to know myself, as a matter of fact, what Sir Peter thinks. I'll ring him up in the morning and fix it up for you all to go over on Tuesday; and I hope it's a day like this."

"Tophole," agreed Susan. "We'll start at eight, or earlier if . . ."

"Here! Steady on!" interrupted Jimmy. "There's no need surely to start at the crack of dawn!"

They all laughed.

"Not for you, Jimmy," Ann explained, "or Keith either, if you're both going in Mr. Cameron's car."

"No; we needn't start," Mr. Cameron said, "till ten, or even later, if you like."

Jimmy pretended to be relieved.

"So long as Peter," he said, "doesn't wake up Keith and me, going off at some unearthly hour. . . ."

As it turned out, they were up, that Tuesday morning, at seven o'clock and, after a bathe in the pool and breakfast in the bright sunshine of another cloudless day, they tacked up the ponies and were off by eight o'clock.

The ride was, in fact, for the first two miles an alternation of walking and trotting along the side of the road. Then Jacqueline led them up a drift that ended in common land.

"Grindley Heath," she said as they entered it.

“There’s a couple of miles of this. You can go as you like across this springy turf.”

This was the signal for a race. Peter started it, challenging Ann and Jacqueline, but Ann, who knew she could beat them all, kept in the rear, watching Jacqueline’s management of Evan Bach with interest. Evan Bach was the first to reach the other side of the Heath, and Jacqueline then led them into a leafy lane.

“There won’t be any motors in this lane, anyhow,” Peter laughed. “It’s hardly wide enough for Blaze, let alone a car.”

“No; it’s pretty narrow,” Jacqueline, who was in front of him, agreed. “And mind your nappers on these branches overhead. It cuts off a corner to come this way. That’s why I chose it: and there’s another reason, too. You’ll see what I mean when we get a bit further on.”

She trotted on, and, in about five minutes they came out at a cross-roads where there were three cottages and a fourth one which was a shop.

“Wilburton Cross,” explained Jacqueline. “I thought we’d rest the ponies here. In that shop they’ve got spiffing cakes—and a wonderful sort of drink. . . .”

“Oh, a drink!” interrupted Peter. “I could drink a gallon in this heat.”

“And me,” agreed Susan. “And the ponies, too, I dare say.”

They slipped off their ponies and tethered them to the gate beside the shop.

“Old Mrs. Cornes,” whispered Jacqueline before they went into the shop, “is a patient of Father’s, though she’s hardly ever ill, so he says. She’s eighty-six, I believe, but she still runs her cottage and serves in the

shop. The point about her is, though, that she makes the most spiffing dandelion and burdock drink. . . ."

"Dandelion and what?" said Ann.

"Burdock," said Susan. "That's a herb, you know."

"They drink it a lot round here," went on Jacqueline, "but most of it's not home-made, like Mrs. Cornes's is."

She led the way through a gate that shielded a garden in front of the shop. The door of the shop was closed and a bell went "Ping!" as Jacqueline opened it. They all blinked as they left the brilliant sunlight and crowded into the shadows of the little shop. It was crammed from floor to ceiling with everything that country people might need to buy.

"Ouch!" grunted Susan as her foot bumped into a sack of potatoes near the door.

"Mind them pots and pans on the floor," said a high-pitched voice that came, Ann saw, from a little, old woman who stood on the left of the door, behind a shop counter that was as full of goods as the shop itself. "They only come in this morning and I 'aven't 'ad time to pack 'em away yet. Why, bless my soul! If it isn't Miss Jacqueline. Ah! how is yer father, my dear? Eee! 'e did me a power o' good last time 'e come."

Her grey eyes, half hidden in wrinkles, twinkled at Peter and Susan and Ann, and then came back to Jacqueline.

"Brought all your friends for a ride, I see," she said. "I 'eard your ponies. Likely ye're wantin' a toffee or two. . . ."

"Toffee!" Jacqueline laughed. "Oh, no, Mrs. Cornes. It's a drink we want. Some of your own home-made dandelion and burdock for preference."

"Ah! that now," Mrs. Cornes replied and her whole face seemed to dissolve into the wrinkles of her smile. "I mind how you liked that yon day when yer father brought you, time I 'ad that fall in the kitchen and hurt me wrist. Eec! that were a nuisance, that were. Couldn't do nowt properly, I couldn't, not with only one 'and. But yer father put it right, as usual. Wunnerful doctor, yer father. But I doubt ye're waiting for your drink."

She left the shop for the house behind.

"Allus keep dandelion and burdock in the scullery 'ere," they heard her call out. "Ain't got no cellar or it would be better there. And there's such a call on it that it don't last out that well. Ah'll bring it along in the glasses ready to drink if you don't mind."

Peter whispered to Ann with a grin.

"Don't care how she brings it, do you," he said, "so long as it's a drink."

And when it came, the drink was all that Jacqueline had said it was.

"Like nectar," Susan said afterwards, "or whatever it was that those funny old gods and people drank. Poor old Dusky! You had to be content with only water out of that tub in the yard."

But none of the ponies, to judge by the pace they now made, had been disappointed by the drinks they had been given in the yard of the shop. They travelled so fast that they seemed to Susan to reach the gates of Rushmere Park in no time after Mrs. Cornes had waved them goodbye from her door.

"Well, this is a bit of all right, I agree," said Peter as they turned in at the gates and walked the ponies up

the gravelled drive. "Miles and miles of woods, it seems. Can we get off this drive or do we have to take it right up to the house?"

"Oh, we'll turn to the right in a minute," said Jacqueline. "There are lots of cart tracks through the woods, and the one we'll take will bring us to the mere. From there you'll see the Abbey across the water, the best view of the place, so Father says."

They all agreed that it was an enchanting view. The track they'd taken had brought them close to the margin of the mere, which was surrounded by a thick belt of reeds. The water glittered in the brilliant sun, and across on the opposite bank stood the Abbey, with its ornamental garden sloping down to the mere. Ann was reminded of Cotswold mansions she had seen.

"Of course," explained Jacqueline as they sat in their saddles gazing at the charming scene, "there's nothing left of the old Abbey now, except what Sir Peter keeps in his Museum. You know the sort of thing—gargoyles and things and bits of carved stone and what is supposed to be an interesting cross; but the house has belonged to the Bringlebanks since it was built. Don't ask me when. Your father will know, Susan, I expect. And that reminds me. I wonder if Mr. Cameron's raced us here. He'd probably go by the other road. We'd better get on and see."

They were soon through the woods and, skirting the eastern end of the mere, they cantered alongside a drive until they could see the front door of the house.

"Yes; he's raced us," Susan exclaimed. "Look! There's the car in front of those steps leading up to the door."

"And there's Sir Peter," said Jacqueline, "talking to your father and Jimmy and Keith over there by that sundial. Look! Where those statues in the garden are. Jimmy will be bored to tears, I'll bet. Looking at statues isn't much in his line."

"More in Keith's, I expect," said Ann as they walked the ponies quietly up the drive. But Sir Peter heard the ponies' hooves.

"Here comes the cavalcade," he said to Mr. Cameron. "My word, these youngsters hold themselves well. I wish I were young again."

He led Mr. Cameron and Jimmy to greet the children as they rode up to the front door. A short, portly man, his face proclaimed that he still was a man of the open air. His white hair, now disarranged a little by the gentle summer breeze, was silky and soft, and Ann was won over at once by his genial smile as he greeted her.

"Well, this is quite an unusual thing for me," he said when they'd all been introduced. "Like a Meet of the Hunt in the old days, eh? Though it's not a fox we're hunting, according to Mr. Cameron. Well, the first thing to do is get these ponies seen to. Take them round to the stables yonder. Whalley, my groom, will show you the paddock. Then come in to lunch. Mrs. Whalley will show you the way."

They led the ponies off to the stables, and Jacqueline, on the way there, managed to explain that Sir Peter was a widower and that Mrs. Whalley, who had been a family servant for twenty years, now managed all the domestic affairs of the house. After they'd taken off the ponies' tack and turned them out to graze, Mrs. Whalley took them to have a wash before they went to

the library, where Sir Peter and Mr. Cameron were discussing a book that Mr. Cameron was examining attentively. Jimmy was reading the *Field* beside the big log fire.

"My hat! What a room!" thought Peter as they entered the door. It was thirty or forty feet long, and three of its walls were lined by books, the fourth being pierced by three large windows, which looked out over the mere and the woods beyond. Susan had paused behind Peter, her eyes held by the three windows and the enchanting view they gave.

"Come along in, my dear," Sir Peter called to her. "Your father has news for you. We've been having quite a successful hunt in my library."

"I should think we have," agreed Mr. Cameron. "Sir Peter," he told them eagerly, "has shown me a book which confirms, what we already knew, that Sir Ashley Durham—— Oh, but of course you don't know yet that the Durham who built the stables at Wanderby wasn't Mr., but Sir Ashley, Durham, a great breeder of Arab stock. . . ."

"Yes," cut in Sir Peter, "nobody ever bred a better horse. Your father was asking me where Sir Ashley lived, but I couldn't answer that. All I know is that he didn't live at Wanderby. Well, no doubt your father will find out. We'll have another look in the library after lunch. The immediate thing for you young people is, I'm sure, a good meal. So come along to the dining-room. If I remember rightly," he added as he led the way to a door at the far end of the room, "I was always ready, after a ride, for something to satisfy the inner man. I never ate much in the saddle. No good huntsman

ever does; but afterwards, when you've broken up your fox—— Ever seen them break up a fox, you children? I expect you have."

Susan, as they took their places round the long oak table in the dining-room, told him that she'd been hunting on foot with Jimmy and Keith and that they'd nearly, but not quite, been in at the kill.

"I'm not sure that I wanted to," she said.

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" Sir Peter said. "The time will come when you'll be given a brush or the mask." He began to carve the sirloin of cold beef in front of him. "Later on," he continued, "it'll come, when you've grown out of that pony of yours and are riding—well, something like the Arabs they bred at Wanderby, eh?"

He chuckled and passed down a plate of beef for Ann.

"Durham, of course," he went on as he carved another plateful, "was quite a man of parts—so rumour goes, at any rate. Quite a scholar in Greek; and wrote poetry, too, they say."

He passed another plate along.

"No use for poetry myself," he said, "so I can't say whether it's true or not. But Durham shouldn't have meddled in politics."

They all looked at him with interest.

"Politics, Sir Peter?" Susan said. "Whatever do you mean?"

Sir Peter chuckled and passed some beef to Mr. Cameron.

"You tell 'em," he said. "Though it's nothing unusual, I suppose, for 'lively times like those."

Mr. Cameron agreed.

"No; a good many people lost their heads in those times," he said. "Sir Ashley was—well, he was executed, you know."

"Executed?" they all exclaimed.

"Yes," Mr. Cameron said. "For getting mixed up with Bonnie Prince Charlie when he came down Derby way. At least, that's what the book in Sir Peter's library says. What he did to deserve such a fate remains a mystery, but there it is—he lost his head. . . ."

"And all his property, too, I shouldn't wonder," Sir Peter put in, "including his Arab stock. Dangerous times for a man of spirit, those; and a Catholic, of course. Now, polish off that beef, you boys, and let me give you some more. Nobody ever leaves Rushmere hungry, you know."

But only Jimmy had more beef. Susan was thinking of Sir Ashley.

"Perhaps, Daddy," she said to her father, "Sulie-man's grave has something to do with that?"

Mr. Cameron smiled at Sir Peter and then announced his second surprise.

"Sulie-man's grave?" he repeated. "Sir Peter here tells me that we've all been wrong about that. Everyone's wrong, it seems. There wasn't, Sir Peter says, any horse called Sulie-man at all. . . ."

"No horse called Sulie-man!" Susan exclaimed; and Sir Peter was delighted by the astonishment on every face.

"Surprises you, does it?" he chuckled. "I thought it would. But it's quite true. I have it in the book in my library. It wasn't Sulie-man who was buried there, but a stallion called Endymion. But nobody else believes it,

of course. The tale goes it was Sulieman; and once a tale's got set in the countryside, well, who's to prove it wrong? There's no name on the grave to back me up; and none, either, on the urn; but I rather think," he chuckled, "I've convinced Mr. Cameron here."

Mr. Cameron shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Well, you haven't convinced me," he said, "but you've made me think. It's a problem for us, Keith, to find out which it is, Endymion or Sulieman. What would you say, Jimmy? You don't look much interested."

Sir Peter laughed.

"Jimmy's not a horseman, perhaps," he said. "He'd be more interested, I expect, in that cock-and-bull story you told me in the library, Cameron, about a lost chalice, or something. Never heard such bosh!"

The children stared.

"Why, isn't it true?" asked Susan in a disappointed voice. "I know there's no evidence yet."

Her disappointment brought an indulgent smile to Sir Peter's face.

"You mustn't believe all the tittle-tattle you hear, my dear," he said. "If I'd believed all the rumours I've heard about Wanderby during my life—well, I'd be a thundering fool. Your father's been taken in, I'm afraid. Why, anywhere you go in England nowadays where there's been a monastery in the past, there are tales galore about what happened to the treasures that they had. Don't you believe this chalice story, Cameron. You're only wasting your time."

They talked about horses and hunting then for the rest of the meal; and after the meal Sir Peter showed

them the books he had about the hunting field and then said to Ann, "I've promised to show Mr. Cameron my Museum. Would you like to come along too?"

Ann put out of her mind what Jacqueline and Jimmy had said about the Museum and the lecture they'd certainly have to endure there.

"Oh, delighted, of course," she accepted. "But shouldn't we be in the way?"

Sir Peter grunted.

"Rubbish," he said. "Cameron! Leave those books now. We'll go along to my little Museum and see what we can find there."

Chapter Eleven

SECOND DIGGINGS AND A FIND

THE Museum interested Susan and Peter and Ann more than they'd expected.

"I liked those Cavaliers' hats," said Peter as they rode back through the woods on their way home, "with their feathers; and those enormous Roundhead boots. I'd no idea there'd been so much fighting round about here in the Civil War."

But Susan hadn't thought very much of those.

"I liked the fox's brush and mask and Sir Peter's old hunting horn," she said, "and all those hunting prints. Did you see that one of Sir Peter in a scarlet coat—the one drawn by Spy? Sir Peter must have been quite a character when he was young."

"Oh, yes," put in Jacqueline. "Father says he used to be one of the crack horsemen round here. You should get him talking one day about his runs with the Cheshire Hunt."

"More in his line than chalices," Peter laughed. "Gosh! When he told your father that the chalice story was all bosh——"

He laughed again.

"I thought Mr. Cameron was going to get really cross," put in Ann as they reached the gates of the Park and went into the road. "But I back your father, Susan. He must have some reason for thinking there really was a golden chalice that was lost."

"Of course he has," agreed Susan. "Well, we've got quite a lot to think about, anyway. Whether it's Sulie-man or Endymion that was buried at Wanderby; and what sort of horses Sulieman and Endymion exactly were. . . ."

"Famous, I'll bet, in their day," said Peter. "And favourites of that fellow—what was his name?—who bred them both."

"Sir Ashley Durham," Jacqueline reminded him. "But I say! It's exciting, isn't it, that he was executed for helping Prince Charlie? I wonder what he did?"

They talked then, as they rode, about Prince Charlie, and wondered whether the Scottish army could have travelled the very road they were on.

"Stragglers might have done," Jacqueline said: "or outriders? What do you call 'em—scouts. . .?"

"Or foraging parties," Peter put in. "You know, going round stealing cattle and stuff for food."

"Well, yes," agreed Jacqueline. "But that wouldn't get old Sir What-is-it into trouble. He'd have to do something more than that. Putting up Prince Charlie for a night or one of his generals or something of that sort."

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When they got back to the camp they found that the table was laid for supper and Mrs. Cameron was busy round the fire. Jimmy, as usual, was busy chopping wood. There was no sign of either Keith or Mr. Cameron.

"Haven't they got back?" asked Ann.

"They're up at the stables," Mrs. Cameron

explained. "They went off to have another look at the grave of Sulieman."

Susan and Ann exchanged a look.

"I wonder what for?" said Ann. "They've seen it many a time."

But, when Keith and Mr. Cameron came back to camp for supper, they soon heard why.

"I rather think we'll change our plan about the diggings," Mr. Cameron said as his wife served the soup. "Keith and I have been looking at that horse's grave. It wouldn't be hard to dig it out. . . ."

"Dig out the grave!" exclaimed Jacqueline. "Why on earth do you want to do that?"

Mr. Cameron calmly began his soup.

"To find out," he replied between spoonfuls, "whether it was Sulieman or Endymion that was buried there. It may not be possible, of course, but, after all, that book of Sir Peter's . . ."

"Said it might be Endymion," Jacqueline cut in.

"While everyone else," put in Susan, "says it is Sulieman. I don't see," she added, "how digging it out will tell us which it was."

"You'll only find," said Jimmy, "a lot of bones, if you find anything at all."

Keith gave him his quiet smile.

"So you think," he countered. "But we think there might be a tablet or something, giving the horse's name."

"It was Keith's idea," Mr. Cameron said. "A very good one, I think."

All except Jimmy agreed, and they all offered to help.

"Of course," said Mr. Cameron, "I shall have to get Mr. Drake's permission to dig up his land. If he agrees, and I've not much doubt that he will, I'll ask him to lend us that rotary plough of his, just to give us a start."

Mr. Drake, they found next day, when Mr. Cameron explained to him why they would like to dig out the grave, was not only willing to lend them his rotary plough, but offered as well to get his men to remove the urn to store it temporarily in his farm.

"So long as all's put back as you found it, I don't mind," he said.

The two men he provided gave a hand with the digging as well, and then left the children and Mr. Cameron to carry on. By late afternoon they had made a considerable crater in the ground on which the urn had stood. It was five o'clock when Mr. Cameron decided that they'd better have a rest.

"Phew!" gasped Susan, leaning on her spade and wiping her brow with her grubby right hand. "Did you say it was hot?"

"Look at the hole we've made," said Peter. "And nobody's found as much as a rabbit's skull."

"Only worms," commented Jacqueline as she picked up something from the soil in front of her. "And these beastly grubs," she added, throwing the grub she had found at Susan's feet. "You all know what those are?" she asked. "They're the sort of thing that Miss Sprigge, our biology mistress at school, goes all crackers about. 'Observe, girls,' she imitated, 'the well-formed head and powerful jaws and the absence of any legs. By the well-formed head and powerful jaws you may suspect that it is a beetle. What do you call it?'" She

hesitated. "Larva—that's the word, I think, meaning a sort of caterpillar, you know, 'and by the absence of legs,' Oh, I can't remember what that shows. Anyhow, that beautiful object you hold in your hand, Susan—'note this carefully, girls—that will become, in a year or two's time, a may-bug'...."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Susan, dropping the grub on the soil. "Beastly things! They fly like acroplanes. One crashed into me once last summer when I was riding Dusky over to Peter's place...."

An excited shout from Keith interrupted her.

"Hi, there!" he called. "Come over here! We've found a tablet or something! Come here quick!"

They dropped their spades and scrambled across the newly-dug soil to Keith and Mr. Cameron, who were squatting over what looked like a rotten piece of wood.

"It must have been a wooden cross," Mr. Cameron was suggesting to Keith. "But look at this metal tablet here. It's got an inscription on it, but it's all so clogged with earth and rusted up that I can't make out what it says. I wonder if someone would run up to the farm and ask Mrs. Drake for a bucket of water and a brush and a few old rags?"

Susan and Peter at once ran off, and while waiting for them Mr. Cameron took from his pocket the penknife that Jimmy had seen before. It had three blades and a corkscrew and a hook at one end and also a stout, pointed spike. Jimmy was more interested in the knife than in the tablet they had found. He watched Mr. Cameron carefully picking, with his penknife's pointed spike, the rust and soil from the tablet in his hand.

When Susan and Peter came back he had already revealed some of the lettering.

"In Memory" was clear enough, but the rest needed careful work with the water and rags and brush.

"There!" said Mr. Cameron at length. "That's about as much as I can do at the moment, I think. It's what I thought it was, a memorial plaque—'In Memory,' he read, 'of the great ——n, who died on ——, 1744 and —— bur—— here.'"

"Just our luck!" exclaimed Susan as she, too, read it out. "The date's not there, except the year, and 'bur——' means 'buried', of course. But the name of the horse, the one thing that we want to know, there's only the last letter of that."

"An *n*," agreed Keith disappointedly; "and that could stand for either Endymion or Sulieman."

"Eight letters," said Jacqueline. "Eight letters in both Endymion and Sulieman. It's rotten luck. If only one other letter had been there, it would have decided, don't you see, which name it was."

But her disappointment vanished when Mr. Cameron uttered an excited grunt.

"I believe I've got it," he told them. "Look! Isn't this last but one letter of the name an *o* and not an *a*? I wouldn't be sure, but I think it is. . . ."

They all squatted down and looked. Jacqueline agreed that it was, but Peter and Susan weren't sure, and Keith said it might be either, so far as he could see.

"But look here!" he suggested, pointing to the middle of the name. "I'll swear that's a *y*, and if it is. . . ."

"It's got to be Endymion!" Peter agreed excitedly.

Jacqueline agreed with Peter, but Mr. Cameron said he couldn't be sure.

"I tell you what we'll do," he said. "We'll take it down to the camp, and then we can all have another go at it after tea. Who's for a bathe? We all look as if a good wash wouldn't do us any harm."

After the bathe and tea Mr. Cameron told them he wanted to have a good look at the tablet by himself in his tent, so Susan and Ann and Peter went out with Jimmy to practise in the canoes.

When they came back they found that Keith and Mr. Cameron had news.

"I hope you won't think I was going behind your backs," Mr. Cameron explained. "But I just couldn't resist it. I've solved the problem, I think."

He explained then that by very careful work he had made sure that the letter in the middle of the horse's name really was a *y*. And better than that," he added, "we've worked out the first letter of the name. It couldn't possibly have been an *s*. There isn't any curve."

"Then it's *e*," cut in Peter; "*e* for Endymion?"

Mr. Cameron nodded.

"Yes. You go and look at the tablet if you like," he said. "I feel quite sure of it myself."

"Hurray!" exclaimed Jacqueline. "Won't old Sir Peter be bucked? I say! Let's ride over on the ponies tomorrow and tell him that he's right."

They agreed to do that, and next morning, soon after breakfast, they set off. Jimmy had planned to stay in camp, but Keith said he wanted to look up a book in the Public Library in the town, and Jimmy decided to go with him in the canoes.

"In that case," Mrs. Cameron said to Jimmy, "I wonder if you would take me down to the town? I've some rather urgent shopping to do, and I thought I'd slip down home and make a cake and perhaps some fruit pies. You're staying in camp here, Jack, didn't you say?"

Mr. Cameron nodded.

"Yes, I want to have a good go at the tablet by myself," he said.

The day, which was windy and overcast, went according to this plan; and at supper-time, when they had all come back, Mr. Cameron announced that he thought he'd made quite certain that the name on the tablet was Endymion.

"I expect old Sir Peter was very pleased to know we've found it?" he said to Jacqueline.

"You bet he was," said Jacqueline. "He wants to come over and see the tablet for himself; but I told him to wait a bit, till we'd got it cleaned up properly."

"Very wise of you," Mr. Cameron agreed. "I think I'm going to get it photographed, and then we could send him a print of that."

"You could," agreed Jacqueline, cutting herself another slice of bread. "But I doubt if he'd be satisfied with that. Gosh! I'm hungry. This wind's perked up my appetite."

Jimmy gave her a scornful look.

"Perked it!" he said. "It's never been unperked, if you ask me."

His sister made a face at him.

"Well, you can't talk," she retorted. "I expect you're

not hungry because you've been lazing about in that canoe all day . . . you and Keith . . ."

She suddenly stopped with the butter-knife in the air. They all stopped eating and listened, exchanging glances as a distant hooter sounded from Selbury.

"Fire-buzzer!" Jimmy exclaimed.

He saw that Peter and Susan had both jumped up and Peter was looking enquiringly at Mrs. Cameron.

He saw an encouraging smile in Mrs. Cameron's eye.

"Yes; I understand," she said with a nod. "Well, off you go, if you want to. . ."

She laughed as Susan and Peter raced off to get their ponies' tack.

"Do you think they ought to," Mr. Cameron said to Ann, "after riding those ponies all day? They'll be tired—the ponies will, I mean. . ."

But Ann didn't want to spoil their fun.

"Don't flog those ponies," she called out to Peter. "They've had a good long journey already, you know. I'd like to go myself, as a matter of fact," she added to Mr. Cameron, "but I think I won't. I'll consume myself in impotence, like Jimmy here, and Keith. . ."

Keith looked up. "It'll only be a haystack somewhere, I expect," he said with a shrug.

Chapter Twelve

STARLINGS' NESTS AT ASH COURT

BUT it wasn't a haystack. Susan and Peter discovered that as soon as they entered the town.

"Where's the fire?" asked Peter of a man who was putting up the shutters of his shop. The man went on fixing the shutters, and over his shoulder replied :

"Ah did hear it was somewhere outside the town," he said. "Stapley Road way, somebody said. I didn't see the engines go, but a man come into t'shop here and said it was Ash Court that's on fire. . . ."

Susan gasped.

"Ash Court ! Good heavens, Peter !" she exclaimed.

The startled jerk that she gave the reins made Dusky throw up his head.

"It can't be !" went on Susan. "It can't be, Peter. . . !"

But Peter had already turned Blaze back the way they had come.

"Quick !" he told her. "Cronkerson's Lane ! That little, cindered lane that leads to Cronkerson's Fields, that's our quickest way to get to your house."

He was off down the street, and Susan, her mind full of visions of Ash Court all ablaze, clattered after him over the worn, grey setts of the ancient street. In less than five minutes they were in Cronkerson's Lane.

"There's the hedge at the end of the lane," panted

Susan as they galloped side by side, "and no gate—only that stile on the left. You go first. There isn't room for us both to jump the hedge together, you know."

"We're not going to," Peter replied. "You take the hedge. I'll take a chance at the stile."

There wasn't time to argue and Peter was already in front. Susan saw him take the stile and, collecting Dusky, she went over the hedge. Then, neck and neck, they raced over Cronkerson's Fields. The paddock and house had never seemed so far away. But they reached the paddock at last and, galloping across it, reached the garden gate.

"Leave the ponies," Peter said.

Together they ran past the stables to see what Susan felt sure would be the horrible sight of her home on fire. But there was no fire. They stopped, halfway down the garden, gasping with inexpressible relief. On the lawn there were firemen, and leaning against the kitchen roof were two ladders from which two firemen were scooping out something through a hole in the roof.

"It looks like hay," exclaimed Susan. "But it can't be that." Mr. Banks, the Captain of the Fire Brigade, smiled.

"Birds' nests," he told them. "Starlings, I shouldn't wonder. They've probably been nesting up in that roof for years."

He went on to explain that there'd been a hole in the chimney stack leading into the space beneath the roof.

"Been there for donkey's years, I suppose," he said. "Warm and cosy for them birds. Trust them to find a good place. There's no cause for worry," he added, noticing Susan's anxious face. "'Tain't the first time



Together they ran fast the stables.

we've had a fire like this. It was caused by a spark from the kitchen fire, I expect. Somebody'd lit the kitchen stove. . . ."

"Yes; Mother did," said Susan. "She was here all day today."

"It's lucky," Mr. Banks said, "that it was noticed from the road. Mr. Blades, coming home in his motor car, noticed it, and giv' the alarm. Mr. Cameron ain't at home, nor nobody else, it seems?" he added enquiringly.

"No," explained Susan; "we're all in camp at Wanderby. Peter, we'd better go back and tell Father. Or will you go and I'll stay. . . .?"

Peter said he would go at once.

"Tell Mr. Cameron," said Mr. Banks, "that all's well and the fire's out. No cause for worry, except that he'd better not light that kitchen stove till the chimney's mended and closed."

Peter went off at a run, and Mr. Banks looked thoughtfully up at the roof.

"Funny places, these old houses," he said. "I been up there—just now, of course, when we first tackled the fire. It warn't much, but it would ha' been if we hadn't got on to it quick. But what I don' understand," he muttered, "is why there should be a wall—a brick wall, inside there under that roof. Rest of it's like any other roof—rafters and that—old, of course, but nothing to make you think. But that wall—seems to me it's funny to build a wall inside a roof like that."

He broke off to answer a shout from the men above.

"All cleared, sir," they shouted down. "Fire all out. Do you want to come up and see?"

"No call for that," Mr. Banks replied. "But leave the ladders standing as they are. I'd like the owner to see. Your father won't be long, I expect?" he added to Susan, who was still wondering what he had meant by the wall inside the roof.

"Not long," she answered absently. "He'll come in his car. But about that wall there, under the roof—why does it seem so funny to you? Do you know what it might be for?"

Mr. Banks smiled.

"If I were like my nipper of a son," he said, "I should want to know what's behind that wall. There isn't a bedroom, by any chance, is there, up there?"

"Only the attics," Susan explained; "and they're in the other wing."

Then suddenly an idea occurred to her.

"Mr. Banks!" she exclaimed. "Do you think, do you really think that behind that wall . . .?" Her eyes met those of the Captain and he smiled.

"There might be a room," she went on, "a hidden—a—a secret room?"

Mr. Banks threw back his head and laughed.

"Always the same, you children," he said. "A secret room—who said it was secret? Not I. I only said it might be a room. A bedroom perhaps, an extra one, used by a former owner, perhaps, and then walled off. After all, this house is very old. . . . It must go back to—well, your father'll know. . . ."

"To the days of Henry the Eighth," said Susan, "or so Father thinks—the older part of it does, I mean—that other wing there with the attics, not this part here, where you've found that wall. If there really is a room

behind that wall, it would have to be next to the attics, but there's no way into it from the attics, I'm sure. We've looked and looked and tapped the walls. Father helped us, as a matter of fact. Oh, I do wish he'd come," she added impatiently.

They hadn't much longer to wait, because five minutes later Mr. and Mrs. Cameron, with Jimmy and Keith and Ann and Jacqueline, all arrived in Mr. Cameron's car. They hurried through the house and out on to the lawn.

"Well, Captain," Mr. Cameron said. "This, I gather from Peter, has been a jolly good job of work. We're awfully grateful, all of us. If it hadn't been for you and your men, our old house, our historic old house——"

He looked round affectionately at the old walls and roofs.

"It goes back to the days of Wanderby Abbey, you know," he said. "At least, I think it does."

"And we've found," cut in Susan, "or, at any rate, the firemen have, a secret room. . . ."

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Well, what the Captain thinks might be a room," explained Susan eagerly: and she told them all that the Captain had said to her. Peter and Jimmy and Keith all wanted to go up the ladders at once to see the mysterious wall. But Mr. Cameron wouldn't let them.

"Not now it's getting dark," he said. "Tomorrow perhaps. We'll see. But you'd better get back to the camp now. Mother and I have decided we'd better sleep here for tonight. You'd agree, Captain, wouldn't you? After what's happened. . . ."

"Well," said the Captain, "it isn't really necessary, sir. The fire's out and . . ."

"Still, I'd like to stay," said Mr. Cameron.

They decided in the end that Mr. and Mrs. Cameron and Susan would stay. The others went back on foot to the camp. "With the prospect before you of a secret chamber to explore tomorrow," laughed Mrs. Cameron to cheer them up.

Chapter Thirteen

WHAT THE FIRE IN THE ROOF REVEALED

THE next day was a busy one. Mr. Cameron had arranged with Mr. Dickson, the builder, to come and examine the roof and see about mending it at once. When Peter and Jimmy and Ann and Keith arrived, they found him up on the roof with Mr. Cameron and two of his men. Seeing the children, Mr. Cameron came down.

"This wall the firemen found is certainly very interesting," he said. "Mr. Dickson thinks it is the outer wall of a room. I've arranged with him to come, now you're all here, up into the attics. . . ."

"To tap all the walls again," Susan explained to them excitedly. "Here's Mr. Dickson coming down now. Suppose we do find a secret room!"

They all went up to the attics and waited eagerly while Mr. Dickson tapped with a small hammer on the wall of the attic next to the roof where the fire had been.

"Couldn't be certain," he told them eventually. "I wonder . . ." He thought for a moment and then said, with his ponderous calm that made Susan want to box his ears to wake him up, "We might take a look through the roof, if you wouldn't mind me taking off a slate or two, Mr. Cameron: On this side of your wall, I mean—between it and the roof of this attic here."

Mr. Cameron readily agreed. But that meant another wait while ladders were fixed and Mr. Dickson and his men went up to make another hole in the roof.

"Anything there?" shouted Mr. Cameron when he saw Mr. Dickson shining a torch through the hole he had made.

"Certain there be," he shouted back. "Queer sort of place. Like a church or summat. . . . Can't make it out, I can't."

Mr. Cameron looked at the children, and they all looked excitedly at him.

"A church," he said, his own pulses beginning to race. "A chapel, he means—a secret chapel. . . ."

Wanderby Abbey—the Dissolution—secret Catholic worship . . . his mind was saying as he spoke.

"My dear!" he said to his wife. "I do believe this fire has led us to a discovery. We must somehow find a way into that room. If we have to cut through the attic wall, I am going to get inside."

For the rest of that day they were all so excited that the time seemed to go like a flash. Luckily, Mr. Dickson was just as interested as they. He and his men worked hard to cut a way through the attic wall; and by evening the job was done. A small opening had been made that led into the room beneath the roof. Mr. Cameron was the first to go in.

"Well, this is a wonderful discovery," they heard him say. "Come in quietly, all of you. This, remember, is a sacred place."

They tiptoed in. By the light of the hole Mr. Dickson had made in the roof, they saw they were in a small room—not even as big as the attic they had left. At its

eastern end, on their left as they entered, and on the side that was nearest to the lawn outside, a small altar, made of wood, still retained its covering of silk. The silk was tattered now and moth-eaten, and the layer of dust that covered it was so thick that the colour of the cloth couldn't be seen. A figure of the Virgin, also made of wood, retained its dignity in spite of its covering of dust. Four chairs and a table beside the altar, all of them loaded with dust, were the only furniture. The walls were bare, the floor, like the floors of the attics, was made of warped old oaken planks.

"Gosh! What a tiny chapel," Susan whispered to Ann. "Did you ever see such dust?"

"Or cobwebs," Ann replied, looking up at the roof. "But, of course, it's been shut off from the house for goodness knows how many years."

"Centuries from the look of it," Susan said, "and from the musty smell. But, I say! What's Father found. . .?"

They hurried across to where Mr. Cameron was standing with Keith in front of a table that stood beside the altar on its northern side. On it there were two books and Mr. Cameron was examining these with reverential care.

"A sixteenth-century Bible," he was saying to Keith. "We'll take that down and examine it at leisure later on. But what's this?"

He opened the other book.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "A diary! Look! In the writer's own hand! This is a find! Come here, all of you, and look! A diary!"

He turned to the flyleaf of the book. For a moment

he stood there, staring; then he turned to them all with the flyleaf of the book held open in his hands.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "Just look! Would any one of us ever have expected this!"

For on the flyleaf, written in the spidery handwriting of those days, was a name that made all of them gasp in astonishment. "Ashley Durham, Kt." they read, and after it, the words they could hardly believe: "Ash Court, Cheshire, 1742."

Mr. Cameron pointed to the address.

"Do you see what it means?" he asked them all. "It means . . . that Sir Ashley lived in this very house. . . ."

"This very house," echoed Susan. "So this chapel was his. . . ."

"And those stables down the garden?" Peter put in. "Is that why they are so big?"

But nobody bothered to answer that. They were all watching Mr. Cameron, who was looking at the diary again.

"Seventeen forty-two," he was saying to himself. "That was three years before Prince Charlie came. He must have been keeping this diary, then, for some time before he was executed for whatever it was he did in the '45. Well, this is odd . . . very odd. . . . It's not what you'd expect to find inside a chapel like this, not beside a Bible, anyway. It's all about horses and horse-racing; eighteenth-century races. Well, of course, we knew that Sir Ashley probably raced. . . ." Then suddenly his face broke into a smile.

"Oho!" he exclaimed. "What's this? A racehorse pedigree? I'm not dreaming, am I, Keith? Look! All the dams and sires of the Arab stock at Wanderby

since—what's that date there? Seventeen hundred and twenty onwards. Well, I never did!"

He turned the page and Keith uttered a sudden cry: "Endymion! Look! Down there at the bottom of the list. Endymion as plain as plain. . . ."

He pointed with his finger and all the others craned their necks to see.

"Endymion it is," Mr. Cameron said as he held the page up for them to see. "Well, this, I must say, is a day of surprises for us all. First we find the chapel here and then we find out that Sir Ashley lived in this very house; to cap all, we find that Sir Peter was right about Endymion. . . ."

He looked at them all in turn.

"And Sir Ashley built," said Susan, "the stables at Wanderby, so all these horses. . . ."

"Are the horses he bred there," Keith cut in, "including Endymion. I wonder what else the diary says, Mr. Cameron?"

Mr. Cameron closed the diary.

"That," he decided, "we must find out by a careful reading later on."

He turned to Mr. Dickson with a happy smile.

"And it's all thanks to you," he said. "Without your help and the fire. . . ."

"And me coming home to make a cake," laughed Mrs. Cameron, "and leaving the kitchen stove alight. And that reminds me, Jack, that I haven't done the ironing yet. Ann and Susan and Jacqueline, would you like to give me a hand with that? There's lunch to get ready, too. Come on, girls; and you boys had better come too. You can come back here when we've tidied up this chapel a bit."

She led the way to the attic and down the narrow, winding attic stairs. But Jimmy couldn't leave the attics as easily as that. He had spotted the dormer windows that led on to the roof and, opening one of them, he put his head outside.

"Come on, you fellows," he said to Peter and Keith. He led the way to the ridge of the roof beside the chimney stack.

"Jolly good view from here," he said. "Golly, to think that under that hole that Mr. Dickson made there's been for Lord knows how many years—— Look out, Peter! Don't go up that chimney stack."

"I'm not going to," Peter laughed. "I was only hanging on to it, standing up. I say, Keith, do you really think that horse in the Wanderby grave is the same Endymion that this fellow talks about in his diary?"

"Of course it is," said Keith. "It said so in the diary. Buried at Wanderby. Didn't you see it? In small writing underneath the name. 'Buried at Wanderby, 1745,' it said. I remember it because that was the year Prince Charlie came."

He relapsed into thought as he sat astride the roof. But Jimmy and Peter had slid to the ridge of the roof of the chapel itself. They were working their way along this to the hole that Mr. Dickson had made.

"Come on, Keith!" shouted Jimmy. "Don't sit dreaming there!"

But Keith took no notice. His mind was far away from Ash Court. Instead of following Peter and Jimmy, he climbed back through the dormer window into the attic again. Mr. Cameron was just about to follow Mr. Dickson down the attic stairs.

"Hello, Keith?" he challenged. "What are you young rascals doing up there on the roof?"

"Oh, nothing," smiled Keith. "Can I have another look at that diary?"

Mr. Cameron told him to come downstairs and, in his study, showed him the diary again.

"I was just wondering," muttered Keith as he looked down the pedigree. "It's only an idea of mine, of course, but you don't think, do you, that Endymion was destroyed by Sir Ashley because he was going to be executed and couldn't bear to leave such a horse to the people who had condemned him to death?"

Mr. Cameron gave him a quick smile.

"Nice idea, Keith, but the answer, I'm afraid, we shall never know."

"Well, it doesn't matter," Keith replied, "but there's something else that does. Look! That's what I mean. Calyce, the dam of Endymion. That's jolly queer. Calyce was really the mother of Endymion,—in Greek mythology. I looked it up in the Public Library yesterday."

Mr. Cameron's eyebrows betrayed his astonishment.

"So that was why you went to the Library?" he said.

"Yes," murmured Keith, his eyes on the pedigree. "But why Calyce?" he asked. "It's a funny name for a horse."

Mr. Cameron had to agree that it was.

"Especially," said Keith, "when not a single horse except those two were given Greek names."

"All more Arab than Greek," Mr. Cameron agreed. "But that's what you'd expect. We know that Durham imported Arab stock. As for the Greek names at the



Prince Charles came here to pray.

end, Calyce and Endymion; well, Durham was quite a Greek scholar, so Sir Peter said. And wrote poetry, too. . . . Hello! We've both of us missed this! Here's a bit of his poetry."

He had found, on the page that immediately followed the pedigree, a paragraph of Ashley Durham's thin, spidery writing and, below this, four lines of verse.

"That's been written in a hurry, I should say," said Mr. Cameron. "And I say! Look at the date at the head of it—Christmas, 1746. Why, Keith, that's only a month or so before he was executed. It must have been written—well, when the poor fellow knew what his fate was to be. It might even be the last thing he ever wrote. Let's see what it says."

"‘To All True Believers,’" he read. "‘I am about to give my life for the Faith, but there will be time, I hope, to close up the only door that leads to this sacred place. Prince Charles, in the hour of his spiritual need, came here for a brief half-hour to pray, and he honoured me by accepting a horse to take him back to his beloved native land. I loved my horses. I loved them too dearly perhaps, and may the Lord forgive me if I erred in that; but above all I loved the greatest treasure that I have, a treasure that belongs to the Lord and that, like all my worldly goods, I must now, in my helpless state, leave to the Will of God.

“ ‘Calyce, whose incomparable worth,
A thieving King once sought to take away,
Rest now in peace until the Judgment Day,
Hunter turned into fox and gone to earth.’ ”

Chapter Fourteen

GONE TO EARTH

WHEN the others heard of the diary, they fastened on it with such curiosity that Mr. Cameron, after tea, read all of it to them page by page in the sitting-room at Ash Court. They were all disappointed to find that, apart from the enigmatic rhyme and the confirmation of what Sir Peter Brocklebank had already told them, it was all about the Arab horses that Sir Ashley Durham had bred. He had raced one or two of them at Newmarket, the diary said, but without success; and Peter and Ann and Susan and Jacqueline were interested in an account of a fox hunt in the neighbourhood; but it did seem, as Mr. Cameron agreed, as if the diary wasn't as interesting as they'd hoped it would be.

"It does prove one thing, at any rate," Mr. Cameron said. "We do know now for certain that Ash Court was very definitely connected with Wanderby, as I suspected it was; but I must confess that I never thought that horse-breeding was the link. I was hoping—well, that there'd be something in the diary to give us a clue to the chalice and now I'm afraid we shall have to look elsewhere. Well, never mind. Some clue or other may turn up. One never knows."

He stood up and looked at his watch.

"Good Heavens, nearly six," he said. "We'd better all be getting back to camp, I suppose."

"Except me," put in Mrs. Cameron, "and you, too, Jack. I want you to help me to do quite a lot of things here yet."

"Such as seeing that the kitchen stove is well and truly out," laughed Mr. Cameron. "Well, off you go, you others. We'll come as soon as we can. You can lay the table for supper. Couldn't they?" he added to his wife.

"Yes, and get the cold beef out of the meat-safe by the bathing pool," said Mrs. Cameron. "And we'll have a tin of pineapple chunks. We could have potatoes in their jackets with the beef, if you like."

"Oh, yes," agreed Susan, who loved potatoes cooked in their jackets in the embers of the camp-fire.

It was Keith who helped her to cook them, but she couldn't get him to talk at all.

"You leave them to me," he told her rather irritably. "I want to think about that funny rhyme in the diary."

He was looking so glum when they sat down to supper that Mr. Cameron whispered to Susan: "What's the matter with Keith? He's not had a row with anyone, I hope?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Susan. "It's only that rhyme in the diary. I haven't been able to get a word out of him since we got back here."

Mr. Cameron raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"Oh, that's the reason, is it?" he whispered back; and then, aloud, as he buttered his potato, he asked whether anyone had had any brain-waves about the rhyme. "What about you, Keith?" he ended. "Have you solved it yet?"

Keith took a bite of potato and chewed it thoughtfully.

"It's that name Calyce," he muttered. "that bothers me. And why Endymion too? Just those two Greek names, just two Greek names—and names of a mother and son, in all that list of names in the pedigree."

He frowned at Ann.

"Ever heard of a horse called Endymion?" he asked. "Let alone Calyce. . . ."

Ann, with a grin at the others, shook her head.

"Calyce sounds more like the botany we learned at school," she said.

"Yes, calyx, corolla, and all that," Jacqueline put in. "But what is it exactly?"

"The calyx," said Mrs. Cameron, "is formed by the sepals as a protection for the bud. It remains, when the bud opens, in some flowers, at any rate—in a tulip, for example—as a sort of protective cup. . . ."

"A cup?" exclaimed Keith.

"Well, yes," went on Mrs. Cameron. "Calyx is Latin, isn't it, Jack? Or Greek or something for a cup. . . ."

She nearly dropped her spoon, because Keith, with a sudden shout of delight, jumped up from the table, knocking over the camp-stool he had been sitting on.

"Calyx, Calyce, cup!" he exclaimed. "Gosh, Mr. Cameron, don't you see? Calycé's the chalice and Calycé's gone to earth. In the grave—don't you see?"

And then the excitement suddenly left his face. "No, of course," he confessed. "It's not Calyce that's in the grave; it's Endymion."

There was silence around the table and Keith's small features were puckered with chagrin.

"All the same," he persisted, recovering his stool and sitting down again, "I still think there's something in this calyx idea of mine. Just think of the rhyme. It fits like a glove. Calyce, treasure of incomparable worth. That's just what a fellow like—what's his name?——"

"Durham," said Mr. Cameron.

"Durham, then," repeated Keith. "To a fellow mad on horses like he was 'incomparable worth' might easily mean a horse."

But Jacqueline wasn't convinced by that.

"But a King, so the rhyme says, tried to steal this thing of incomparable worth," she said. "And what King would want to steal a horse? They've all, so far as I know, had—well, dozens and dozens of their own."

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" quoted Ann with a wave of her hand. "But that was Richard the Third, not Henry the Eighth."

Keith jumped up from the table again, excitedly.

"You've got it!" he exclaimed. "Ann's got it! Henry the Eighth! What mutts we have been! Why, wasn't it Henry the Eighth who sacked all the monasteries? Wanderby included," he added to Mr. Cameron. "Oh, don't you all see what I mean?" he went on. "Henry was after the Wanderby goods; they wanted to save as much as they could, especially the chalice, so they jolly well saw that old Henry shouldn't get his fingers on that. . . ."

Jimmy's laugh interrupted him.

"Foxed the old boy, you mean?" he asked; and he couldn't understand why Keith gave him such a concentrated stare.

"Foxed?" Keith repeated. "Foxed?"

"And gone to earth," said Ann.

It was Jacqueline who divined their thoughts.

"They've got it!" she exclaimed. "Thundering hooves! I believe they have! Foxed, don't you see it, Susan? Foxed and gone to earth? It isn't a horse at all up there. It's a calyx in that grave—a Calyce, I mean—a golden chalice, not a horse. . . ."

They looked at each other incredulously, all their faces flushed; but Mr. Cameron only shook his head.

"I'd like to believe it," he slowly said. "You know how much I would. But you've overlooked what Keith's just said. Supposing, as you've supposed, that Calyce means chalice and not Calyce, the horse, the inscription on the tablet says that it's not Calyce, but Calyce's stallion son, Endymion, that's buried there. We can't get over that."

He looked round at their disappointed faces with a smile.

"All the same," he conceded, not wishing to damp their enthusiasm too much, "it's just possible—I'd like to believe it is—that the reason why Endymion's on that tablet thing—it might be, what do they call it in the hunting field—something, you know, that fouls the scent of the fox. . . ."

"Like cattle?" said Ann. "Or petrol fumes?"

"Exactly," Mr. Cameron agreed, "or even, sometimes, I understand, another fox's scent may do the same thing, when the one they're after crosses the trail of another one. Doesn't that happen sometimes?"

"Often," said Jimmy. "It happened last winter when Keith and I took Susan out on foot."

"Well, that was what I had in mind," Mr. Cameron

went on. "Anybody who wanted to put the hounds off the scent, so to speak, he'd naturally make it as hard to follow as he could, except—and please, all of you, pay special attention to this—except for the sort of person he might wish to help to secure the prize."

He smiled round at the puzzled faces surrounding him.

"I've been trying, you see," he went on, "to put myself in Ashley Durham's place. If I were about to be executed . . ."

"Jack!" Mrs. Cameron exclaimed.

"Well, it might happen. You never know," Mr. Cameron said with a laugh. "If I were about to be executed, if I knew, for instance, as Sir Ashley, if we are to believe his diary, seemed to know, that the officers of the law were already on their way to my house, and, if I wanted to hide, and hide effectively, something very dear to me—what better could I do than bury it somewhere, in some place, for preference, where nobody would be likely to look for it, for the very simple reason that something else that was quite without value was already buried there—in a grave, for instance. . . ."

He paused with his eyes on the sunset over the trees where the Abbey was. Could that have been, he was wondering, how Ashley Durham's mind, distracted by the shadow of death, had actually worked? In a horse's grave the chalice would be safe, at any rate, from the men who sought his life. Sooner or later, so this devout and distracted man might have argued to himself, the grave might be dug up and his beloved chalice found; but that could happen only by chance, when a future builder or farmer, for instance, disturbed the soil for



In a horse's grave the chalice would be safe.

quite legitimate purposes; and the chances of that, and of the chalice being found then, were really quite remote. For the rest, the grave was safe enough. Yet he could, he might argue—and there might be just enough time to do it before the chapel was walled up—he could leave, in the chapel, a clue to the chalice's hiding-place.

"Father!" said Susan, "what on earth is worrying you so much?"

"Oh, nothing," said Mr. Cameron. "I was just deciding, that's all, that we'll do some more digging on that grave—not for a horse, though, this time, but to see whether Keith is right. . . ."

"For the chalice?" Susan exclaimed. "Oh, Daddy! We'll jolly well help with that!"

"I should think we will," agreed Jacqueline. "When can we start? Tomorrow? Jimmy, give up your canoe for once and come and give us a hand."

"Well, if I must," he agreed. "But it seems a pretty feeble game to me."

Chapter Fifteen

WET DAY: WHO CARES FOR RAIN!

BUT they had to possess their souls in patience for another day. For they all awoke the next morning to a wet and bedraggled camp and countryside. Mr. Cameron, out of bed as soon as he heard the rain, fished out his gumboots and mackintosh and went out to look at the scene.

"Well, this is a day for the marquee," he said to his wife when he came back. "It looks like going on all day; the skies are like dirty cotton-wool, and those poor ponies look wretched under the trees by Wanderby Brook."

Mrs. Cameron, who had already looked out, was busy doing her hair.

"Do the children know?" she enquired. "Are any of them awake?"

Mr. Cameron slipped off his mackintosh.

"I didn't hear a sound from any of the tents," he said. "Better, perhaps, not to wake them up. I don't suppose they'll want to bathe this morning!"

But he was wrong. Jimmy, as soon as he woke up and saw the rain, was out of his tent in a bathing costume.

"Susan! Jacqueline! Ann!" he called out. "Show a leg! Stick on your bathing costumes and come out into the rain. It's gorgeous out here—like red-hot needles sticking into your skin!"

He was answered by groans and yawns from Jacqueline; but Susan jumped up and, giving Ann a prod in the ribs, pulled on her bathing costume and cap and put a bare leg out into the rain.

"Oh, lovely!" she said. "Come on, Ann! I'm off for a bathe. . . ."

She disappeared, and Ann, getting up, looked out to see Keith and Jimmy already in the bathing pool. The river, she saw, was covered all over with little silvery water-spouts, each of them circled by ripples where the raindrops fell. She followed the others and plunged into the pool.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said as she came up. "Rain! I never knew that bathing in the rain could be such fun. Hello, Mr. Cameron! Isn't Jacqueline coming too?"

Mr. Cameron laughed and dived in.

"She's still asleep, I think," he said as he, too, came up. But Jacqueline, roused at last by their excited shouts and cries, joined them at last and in the water they had a conclave about their plans for the day.

"It's no use thinking of digging in this," decided Mr. Cameron. "The ground will be soaked by now."

"Like digging in glue," laughed Jimmy. "I said it was a feeble game. We'll have to bale those canoes out, Keith; and how we're going to light a fire I've no idea."

Mr. Cameron swam towards the bank.

"A fire's hopeless, of course," he said. "But we've got the Primus stove. Come on, all of you. Don't stay in too long. Who's turn is it to go and get the milk?"

"Mine and Peter's, unfortunately," Jacqueline said as she climbed out with the others on to the bank.

By the time that Jacqueline and Peter came back

with the warm and creamy milk that the farm supplied, the savoury smell of bacon and eggs filled the warm interior of the green marquee.

"Gosh! What a lovely smell!" said Jacqueline, putting down the milk. "And don't you all look green in here. Ann, you look as if you'd gone and got some beastly disease!"

They all laughed; and a breakfast of bacon and eggs, with hot tea and bread and butter and marmalade, made them all forget the rain. Jimmy and Keith, with Susan and Peter, put on their bathing costumes again and went out in the canoes to practise falling out and getting in again. As Jimmy put it, they might as well be in the water if they'd got to get wet. Ann and Jacqueline put on gumboots and went to see that the ponies were all right.

"And when you've finished with that," said Mrs. Cameron, "come back here and give me a hand. I've got an idea for a rather special lunch."

Mr. Cameron, after he'd mended one of the campstools that had broken, went off to his tent to look at the tablet again; but, after an hour or so at that, he heard the canoes coming back again from the bathing pool. He went to the door of his tent to watch them come in.

"Well? How did it go?" he called out as they beached the canoes and turned them upside-down on the grass near the river bank. Susan waved.

"Lovely!" she answered. "Jimmy says I'm getting quite decent at falling out and getting in again."

"And Peter?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"Oh, he's all right," said Jimmy, "They're both of them safe enough to go out alone now."

He ran with the others to the tents.

"Don't go into the marquee, any of you," Mr. Cameron called from the door of his tent. "Mummy and Ann and Jacqueline are busy on a surprise for us all in there. You get books or something, and I'll beat the gong for you when it's time for lunch."

The gong was an empty biscuit tin, and two or three beats on it with a fork brought Jimmy and Peter and Susan running to the marquee.

"Well, what's the surprise?" asked Jimmy as they crowded in. Ann, he saw, was bending over a frying-pan, in which something sizzled on the stove.

"Wait and see!" she told him. "And don't you, any of you, look till I bring it round."

But Susan had seen what was in the pan.

"Oo! fin niballs!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Mother! What a treat!"

They all sat down impatiently while Mrs. Cameron and Ann served out the dish.

"For those of you who have never tasted fin niballs," Mrs. Cameron explained, "I'd better explain that we got the recipe for them from a charming Finnish lady who stayed with us once . . ."

"Down at Camford," Susan cut in. "She was learning English there. They're made by sort of cutting up beef and mincing it, aren't they, Mother?"

"Well, sort of, as you put it," Mrs. Cameron agreed with a smile at Ann. "Though it's not quite so easy as that. They're a favourite dish in Finland, I believe. Help yourselves to potato crisps, everyone."

Jimmy had already done this.

"I've made sputniks out of mine," he announced.

"Look! Like this, by sticking bits of potato crisp all over them."

They all looked at his plate with its meat-balls studded with little potato spikes.

"Space-diet for invalids!" Peter exclaimed, and began to eat his.

They all followed suit and everybody agreed that fin niballs were just the thing for wet days in camp. As they ate the tinned apricots and cream that followed, they talked about what they would do that afternoon.

"The rain's not quite so bad, I think," Mr. Cameron said as he helped Mrs. Cameron to hand hot coffee round. "But it's still too wet to do very much. What about a game of Monopoly?"

They all voted for that, except Keith, who said he'd got something to write, and he'd go and do that in his tent.

"Poetry, you bet," whispered Jimmy to Ann. "Leave him to it. It's no use arguing with him when he gets like that. Oh, aren't you playing?" he added to Mr. Cameron, who was putting on his mackintosh.

"Well, no, if you'll let me off," Mr. Cameron said. "I thought I'd just stroll up and see how the digging ground is getting on."

But Mrs. Cameron said she would take his place.

Soon the tent was loud with bids and counter-bids. By the time Mr. Cameron came back Peter owned Mayfair and Park Lane, with Vine Street, Whitechapel and King's Cross; Mrs. Cameron was bankrupt, with mortgages on Piccadilly and Pentonville Road; Ann had a lot of houses in Fleet Street and the Strand, but she was fast in jail; and Susan, who showed a decided

tendency to plunge, had been forced to auction all she had, except the waterworks.

"Get rid of it!" Jimmy was urging her. "We've had quite enough of waterworks outside."

"We have," agreed Mr. Cameron. "But, as a matter of fact, the rain's very nearly stopped. Still, I'm afraid the ground at the Abbey's in a hopeless state. We can't dig till it's dried out. Tomorrow, perhaps, we might start. Mr. Drake says that it drains very quickly, so we'll hope it'll be all right. He asked me, by the way, if you'd all like to go up to the farm to watch his television after tea. There's a Western on, he says, with lots of horses and all that sort of thing."

"Goodee!" exclaimed Susan. "We're sure to see some exciting riding, anyway."

"And let's hope," Mr. Cameron said, "for a fine night and a hot sun tomorrow, and then—well, it's all hands to look for that chalice and see whether Keith is right."

Chapter Sixteen

THIRD DIGGING AND A BOX

THEY were lucky, because the night was fine, and during it all the clouds were swept away by a gentle north-westerly wind. The sun was bright when they all woke up and, while they were having their bath before breakfast, everyone agreed that digging must be the order of the day. Even Jimmy, when they reached the digging site, threw himself into the work as vigorously as anyone else.

"Thank Heaven it's cooler," said Ann, who was working by Susan's side, "though the soil is pretty sticky, after all that rain."

The site had been quartered by Mr. Cameron, and each of them had an allotted square to dig.

"We jolly well look," said Jimmy, "like a lot of convicts digging on Dartmoor, or wherever it is that they dig. What are we looking for, anyway? Bones? Or will that chalice thing be in a coffin or what? Does anybody know?"

"In a box very likely, so Mr. Cameron said," explained Jacqueline. "Anyhow, you just shut up. Dig! It's a serious job for us, if it isn't for you."

Jimmy laughed and flicked some earth at her with his spade.

"Serious, my hat," he chaffed. "We might be jolly old pirates the way you talk."

But Jacqueline took no notice of him.

"Just look at Keith," she said to Ann. "He's going to find the chalice, if anybody is."

Keith was, in fact, digging harder and faster than anyone else. His face was set and his small body, naked except for his brown shorts and boots, rose and fell with such a rhythmic fury of vigour that Mr. Cameron, working next to him, wondered how long he would last.

"Take it easy, Keith," he counselled. "We may have to go on doing this all day, you know."

But Keith didn't pause.

"I'm sure I'm right," he said as he flicked a stone aside with his spade. "About Calyce meaning the chalice, I mean. If only someone could find a bone of Endymion. Or will they have all rotted away by now, d'you think?"

Mr. Cameron leaned on his spade for a rest.

"It's hard to say," he replied. "It's—let me see—two hundred years since Endymion was buried here, and they wouldn't put him in a coffin, you know."

Just then Ann's spade struck something hard.

"I say!" she exclaimed. "I've found something, I think."

They all stopped work and Susan helped Ann to dig out what she had found.

"Oh, it's only a chunk of stone!" she told them disappointedly.

"Something from the old Abbey, probably," Mr. Cameron decided after examining it. "Put it aside on the grass over there. We'll look at it later on."

The digging went on without incident, until Jimmy, working on the southern edge of the site, found a rabbit's skull and held it up triumphantly.

"Endymion's skull!" he announced. "Alas! Poor Yorick!"

He was disappointed when nobody laughed.

"Gosh! Did you say it wasn't so hot this morning," Ann was saying as she paused a moment to tidy her hair. "If you ask me..."

But a shout from Susan interrupted her.

"I've got something!" Susan exclaimed excitedly. "Really something! Not a stone, I'm sure."

She was down on her knees and digging with her hands instead of her spade.

"Look!" she exclaimed to Ann. "Father! Peter! All of you! Come and look! It's a box or something I've found, with iron bands!..."

They all ran over and crowded around the place where, out of the soil, a small, metal-bound box was clearly visible.

"I say!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron. "Susan, I do believe you've really got something here! Let me give you a hand. You others, stand aside while we dig it out."

It didn't take long to expose the box. Mr. Cameron, kneeling beside it, helped Susan to scrape away the earth till it lay there before them, a small box about eight inches long by about six inches wide and about as deep as its breadth. Its lid was convex and around it there were four broad metal bands. A small keyhole at one side was rusted and closed with earth.

"There!" said Mr. Cameron, excitement and reverence blended in his voice. "There's your treasure, Susan, and, if I know anything about these things, this is exactly the sort of box they used to keep their chalices in."

Susan, thrilled, looked down at the box. The others, too, were silenced by the excitement of the discovery. Nobody moved or spoke till Keith dropped suddenly down on his knees to get a closer view.

"Be careful, Keith!" exclaimed Jacqueline; and Mr. Cameron, on his knees beside the box, also warned Keith.

"The wood," he said, "after all these years in the soil, may be rotten between those metal bands. Not that we can see the wood, with all that earth crusted over it like that."

He worked his fingers carefully beneath the box.

"It's loose now," he told them. "Look. I'll lift it up for you all to see."

Carefully, with hands that trembled a little, he lifted the box and turned it this way and that.

"We must take it," he said, "to the camp and try to open it. No; better than that, we'll take it along to Ash Court. I'd better get Reynolds, the locksmith in King Street, on to this. And I think we'd better have witnesses, too, because this may be treasure trove."

He thought for a moment.

"I know who we'll have," he went on. "Sir Peter himself. He's a J.P. still, I believe; and he used to be Lord Lieutenant not very long ago. We'll take the box to Ash Court and I'll ring him up from there. Come on, all of you, down to the camp, and we'll tell Mummy and see what she can provide to celebrate."

Chapter Seventeen

THE HERITAGE OF WANDERBY

SIR PETER, they found, was so excited about the box that he said he'd come over to Ash Court that very afternoon.

"I simply must clap eyes on the thing," he said on the telephone, "even if we can't manage to open it today. It may be a really great and important discovery, Cameron, and I congratulate you. Expect me at three, if that's all right for you?"

Mr. Cameron said he'd have everything ready by then.

"I'm asking my solicitor, Wilson, to come along as well," he said. "Just in case it is the chalice, you know. Might as well have it all legal and all that."

Sir Peter agreed.

"Though you'll look pretty silly," he added, and his throaty chuckle crackled over the telephone, "if there's nothing in the box."

Mr. Cameron felt, at the sound of that chuckle, a flicker of irritation and then a twinge of doubt.

"Of course there'll be something in the box!" his mind protested, "If it's not the chalice, it's bound to be something else."

But what else it could be, he had no idea. His doubt was so persistent, however, that he told the children at lunch what Sir Peter had said. Keith merely frowned

and Ann, calm as usual, smiled and shrugged her shoulders, and Susan said indignantly, "What an idea!"

"Oh, that's just Sir Peter," Jacqueline said. "He's always joking like that."

They were all a bit shaken, however, by the idea that they might not find the chalice in the box. The time seemed to go on leaden feet till a quarter to three. Then Mr. Reynolds, the locksmith, arrived with his bag of tools and keys; and soon afterwards Mr. Wilson came. The two, thought Ann, were just about as different as two men could be: Mr. Reynolds burly, black-haired, practical and shy; Mr. Wilson tall, grey-haired and gravely dignified. It was after three o'clock when Sir Peter, smiling benignantly, arrived.

"Well! Well! Well!" said Sir Peter when he was ushered in by Mr. Cameron. "Afternoon, Wilson. Afternoon, Reynolds. I've got a job for you out at Rushmere when you've got time to come. See you about it after this. So this is the box, is it? Somebody must have been cleaning it up a bit, by the look of it."

Mrs. Cameron explained that she and the children had given it a wash and had polished it as well as they could.

"And it needed it, I am sure," Sir Peter said, "after two hundred years in the earth up there at Wanderby. But never mind that. The metal bands are still quite good, I see. But the lock, Reynolds, that's going to be a problem, isn't it?"

"Not so bad as I reckoned on when I first saw it," Mr. Reynolds replied. "I been getting a dose of oil into it and trying me keys here on it before you come. This one'll likely do it, I think. . . ."

And he held up a key that was one of a bunch in his hand.

"Skeleton keys!" whispered Peter to Ann. "The sort that burglars use!"

"But, of course," Mr. Wilson was explaining to Sir Peter, "we haven't opened the box yet. We couldn't do that before you came."

Sir Peter chuckled and scratched his chin.

"Waiting to show me there's nothing in it, Cameron, eh?" he said. "What'll you children say if it's empty, eh?"

He took up the box in his two red hands.

"Not that it feels so empty, by the weight of it," he said. "Well, Reynolds, go ahead. We're all dependent on what you can do now."

All eyes were on Mr. Reynolds as he inserted the key he had chosen into the keyhole and coaxed it to open the lock.

"Rusty, of course," he muttered, his wide mouth screwed up sideways as he seemed to Susan to guide the key by the sound of its grating rather than by the feel of it in his hand

"Needs a bit of coaxing," he went on muttering. "Doubt if it's going to do it—this key—maybe another one—awkward it is—I doubt—no—yes—ah! that's got it!" he suddenly said with a satisfied grunt. "That's got it! There's your lock, Mr. Cameron, open for you like your own front door."

They all looked at the box and even Sir Peter leaned eagerly forward as Mr. Cameron, with a hand that shook a little, tried to lift it. But the lid wouldn't budge.

"All rusted up, as I feared," he said. "Reynolds, you'll have a tool for dealing with lids, I suppose?"

Mr. Reynolds, already rummaging in his bag of tools, produced a screw-driver with a sharpened edge.

"This mebbe will do it," he said : and, scraping away the rust in the groove between the lid and the box, he inserted the screw-driver in the groove and began to prize up the lid.

"Easy does it," he muttered. "No use trying to rush a job like this."

The lid creaked.

"He's doing it!" whispered Susan excitedly.

And she was right. Slowly, on creaking hinges, the lid came gradually up.

"The chalice! It is the chalice!" the children all shouted, dancing on their toes. For there, in the mouldering velvet lining of the box, its beauty partly obscured by the tattered remains of the velvet cloth in which it had been wrapped two hundred years ago, was a golden chalice, a cup of such beautiful workmanship that none of them could speak as they gazed at its ancient gold. Then Mr. Cameron, not quite able to control the tremor of his hands, lifted it out of the box. His fingers caressed it, turned it over this way and that, and then he lifted it up for everyone to see.

"The golden chalice of Wanderby," he said; and his voice was shaking a little as he added : "Lost for two hundred years."

Susan watched him, astonished; she had never heard that note in her father's voice before. Neither she nor Keith were pleased when Jimmy, his hands in his



The golden chalice of Wanderby.

pockets, said : "Gosh ! Is it all gold ? It must be worth a dickens of a lot !"

But Keith's face was rapt as he gazed at the golden cup outlined against the pale yellow wall of the dining-room. In his mind were the words he had read in the diary : "To All True Believers"; and underneath that the hurried words written in that spidery script by the doomed, devoted hands that had laid, two hundred years ago, the chalice in that box.

"So you see, Sir Peter," he heard Mr. Cameron saying, "you'll have to admit you were wrong. There was something in the box, and we owe its discovery to Keith. . . ."

Keith flushed when they all looked round at him. He felt very glad; deep down in his heart a warm satisfaction glowed; for he knew that the chalice, "the dearest possession" of the man who had written the diary, had come now to a man who would value it at its true worth, not because it was made of gold, but because it was a work of art and a sacred, dedicated thing that would find its way, so Keith hoped, back to the Church from which it had come and to which it rightly belonged.

Chapter Eighteen

BUT GIVE ME A PONY EVERY TIME

THE problem then for them all was to decide what to do with the chalice now it had been found. It was Mrs. Cameron who suggested that they discuss this over a cup of tea.

"I wonder what they'll decide to do with the chalice," Peter said to Keith as they went across the hall towards the sitting-room. "I think Susan ought to hang on to it. She found it, and finding's keeping, isn't it?"

"Or Keith," said Jimmy. "After all, without him, we shouldn't have known it was buried up at Wanderby at all."

Keith and Susan both laughed at the idea of having the chalice for themselves.

"I'd just as soon steal the Communion plate from the Church here in Selbury," Keith exclaimed.

"And me, too," agreed Susan. "Besides, it's treasure trove. It'll have to go to the police or somebody, I expect."

They found when they entered the sitting-room that this was exactly what the grown-ups had decided to do.

"I certainly couldn't keep it here," Mr. Cameron was explaining when they went in. "We're not living in this house just now, you know. We're all in camp; and we couldn't be responsible for it there. If you, Wilson, could take it on to the police this afternoon . . .?"

"I will," Mr. Wilson readily agreed. "I'll explain what it is; and, as soon as I've decided what the legal position is, I'll let you know."

"Then that's all settled," Mr. Cameron said. "The Church must have its say, of course; and I hope I'll be able, later on, to have a good look at it myself. I should like to write a paper about it all. There's the chapel, too, to be examined yet. And that reminds me, Sir Peter. You haven't seen the chapel yet; nor you, Wilson. Would you like to have a peep at it now, while we're waiting for tea?"

Mr. Cameron took them both upstairs. Keith went with them, but Susan and Peter went out through the french window into the sunshine, which, while they had been opening the chalice box, had broken through the clouds. They were climbing the beech tree over the upper lawn when Mrs. Cameron and Ann and Jacqueline came into the sitting-room with tea.

"Now where have they all gone?" asked Mrs. Cameron. "Isn't this just like men. And where are Peter and Susan and Keith?"

It was Ann who spotted Peter up the tree.

"Where are the others?" she called out to him. "And where's Susan gone?"

"Here!" replied Susan from the weeping ash; and Peter explained where all the others had gone.

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Cameron. "And I've not had time yet even to go round the chapel with a cobweb brush."

But Sir Peter and Mr. Wilson and Mr. Cameron, when they came downstairs, had evidently not given a thought to cobwebs or to dirt.

"A remarkable place," Sir Peter told Mrs. Cameron as he took the teacup that Jacqueline offered him. "If I'm not mistaken, you've made in this delightful old house of yours a discovery that will find a place in all the history books. I should like to come and look at it more carefully some other time, if I may?"

"By all means," Mrs. Cameron said. "Come whenever and as often as you like. We're in camp, as you know, at the moment, but next week my husband and I will be back here in the house again. The children may stay on. They're all right there alone."

"I'm sure they are," Mr. Wilson said. "They'll be having the time of their lives. I wish I could join them there."

He put down his teacup and, looking at his wrist-watch, said it was time he went.

"With the chalice, remember," Sir Peter said. "Don't you forget that!"

He picked up the chalice box and thrust it in Mr. Wilson's hands.

"I'll have to be going, too," he said to Mrs. Cameron. "But, before I go, where's Susan? I'd like a word with her."

Ann, who was drinking a second cup of tea by the french window, laughed.

"Up there!" she told him, and pointed to Susan, whose head and shoulders and tousled hair were sticking out of the top of the weeping ash.

"Susan!" she called. "Come down! Sir Peter wants to speak to you."

But Sir Peter, chuckling, went through the french window and out on to the lawn.

"What on earth is he up to now?" asked Jacqueline as she and Ann helped Mrs. Cameron to stack the tea-things up.

"Oh, Heaven knows!" said Mrs. Cameron. "Just open the door for me, Ann, while I wheel this trolley through."

She was in the kitchen with Ann, unloading the trolley, when suddenly Susan excitedly rushed in.

"Mummy!" she said. "You'll never guess! Sir Peter's invited me over to Rushmere some time next week, and Ann, too, and Peter, if they both want to come. He says that a friend of his—I didn't catch his name—trains a lot of ponies somewhere over there, and he's short of riders to exercise them, and Sir Peter wonders whether"—her eyes met Ann's—"he wonders," she went on, "whether you, Peter and I would like, if we've got the time, to go over there and ride them whenever we like. . . . Oh, Mummy, couldn't we do it? Father says I can, but he thought I'd better ask you and Ann as well. . . ."

Mrs. Cameron pushed back a wisp of her hair.

"Well, I don't know," she said with a look at Ann. "I can see that you want very much to go. But what about the ponies, Ann? Will they be trained, do you think? I'm not sure that Susan's a good enough rider yet to handle them if they're not."

Ann fingered her lip. She knew that determined, eager look on Susan's face.

"Well, I don't see why she shouldn't," she said. "After all, she's had quite a lot of experience. And I'll go, too. But mind, Susan! There'll have to be no hanky-panky if I back you up."

Susan ran and seized her by both hands.

"Oh, I'll be," she promised, "as quiet and obedient—well, as Pepper usually is."

"Or Dusky," laughed Ann.

"And more obedient," Mrs. Cameron said with a smile, "than you sometimes are with me. Well, I'll agree, if Father does; but only provided that Ann goes too. Let's go along, shall we, and thank Sir Peter, and then, when he's gone, you'd better all be thinking of getting back to camp."

"Alone," exclaimed Susan excitedly as they went down the passage to the sitting-room. "We shall be on our own in the camp tonight; and tomorrow, let's have a competition or something in the field, shall we, Ann? I'm sick of chalices, aren't you? They're all right for Father, of course; and Keith seems to like them, too; but for you and me and the others—well, give me a pony every time."